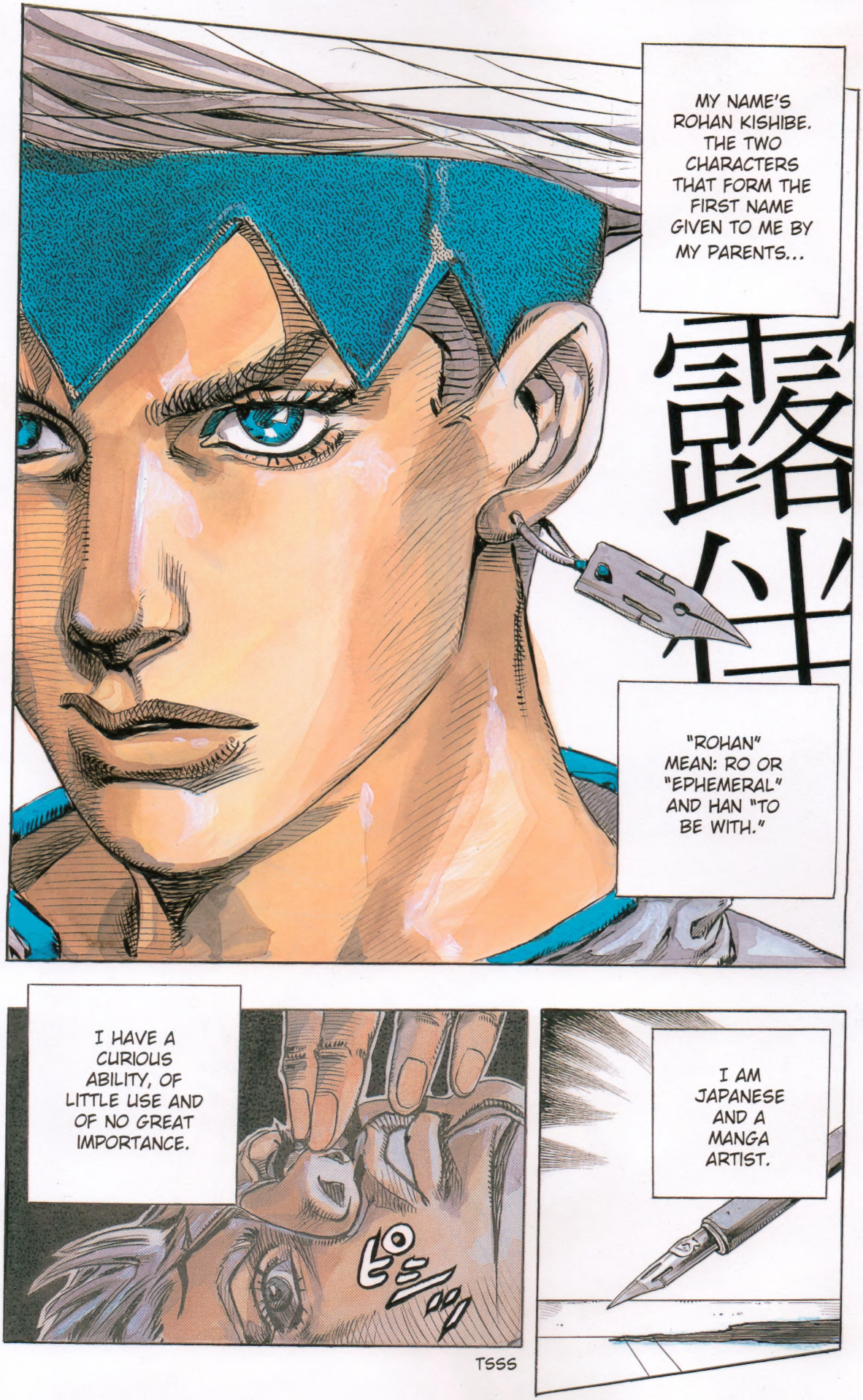
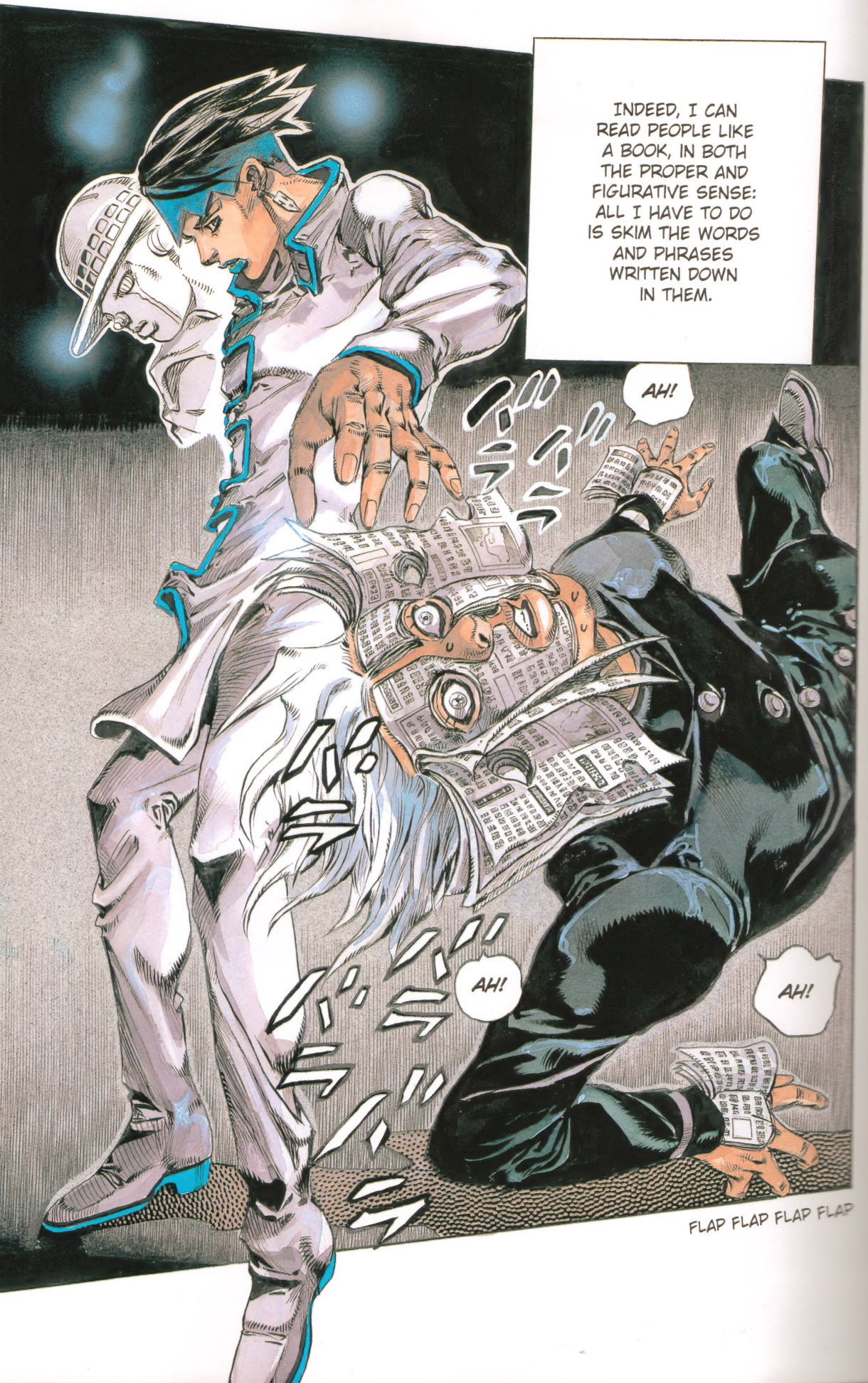
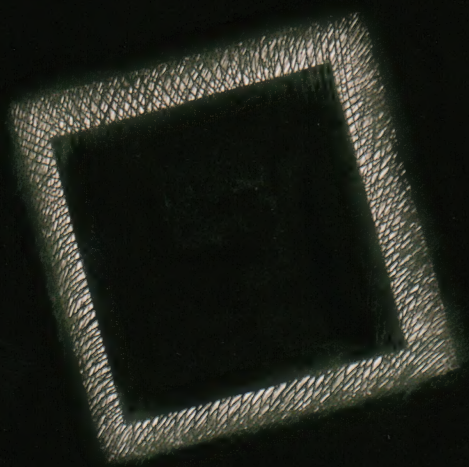

MY NAME'S ROHAN KISHIBE. THE TWO CHARACTERS THAT FORM THE FIRST NAME GIVEN TO ME BY MY PARENTS...
露伴
"ROHAN" MEAN: RO OR "EPHEMERAL" AND HAN "TO BE WITH."
I HAVE A CURIOUS ABILITY, OF LITTLE USE AND OF NO GREAT IMPORTANCE.
I AM JAPANESE AND A MANGA ARTIST.
TSSS


INDEED, I CAN READ PEOPLE LIKE A BOOK, IN BOTH THE PROPER AND FIGURATIVE SENSE: ALL I HAVE TO DO IS SKIM THE WORDS AND PHRASES WRITTEN DOWN IN THEM.
AH!
AH!
AH!
FLAP FLAP FLAP FLAP

MY READER-FRIENDS, HAVE YOU EVER SEEN THE BLACKEST COLOR IN ALL THE WORLD?



SORRY, MY QUESTION IS STUPID. FOR, AS LONG AS LIGHT EXISTS, NOBODY CAN PERCEIVE SUCH BLACKNESS WITH ONE'S EYES.

AH.

AND YET...

THAT "DEEP BLACK" REALLY DOES EXIST. I KNOW SO FOR HAVING BEEN THE WITNESS, LAST SEPTEMBER, OF AN EXTREMELY WEIRD PHENOMENON. I SAW, FOR THE FIRST TIME, THE DARKEST BLACK EVER.

LET ME TELL YOU OF THAT ADVENTURE.

BEFORE ALL ELSE, KNOW THAT OVER THE COURSE OF THE TRIP THAT LED ME TO UNDERGO THAT EXPERIENCE, FOUR PEOPLE DISAPPEARED:

A JAPANESE WOMAN, A TRANSLATOR INTO FRENCH, TWO FRENCH FIREMEN,

AND AN OFFICIAL FROM THE FAR-EAST SECTION OF THE LOUVRE'S ASIAN ARTS DEPARTMENT.

EVEN NOW, THE AUTHORITIES ARE STILL SEARCHING FOR THEM.
THE STORY I'M ABOUT TO TELL YOU IS WHAT LED TO THEIR DISAPPEARANCE.

IT ALL STARTED IN JAPAN, TEN YEARS AGO. I WAS SEVENTEEN BACK THEN.
MY MATERNAL GRAND-MOTHER OWNED AN INN IN THE QUARTER OF MORIO-CHO, IN THE CITY OF S. AFTER MY GRANDFATHER'S PASSING, SHE CLOSED THE INN AND RENTED THE ROOMS OUT BY THE YEAR.

I WAS STILL A STUDENT AT THE TIME, ON MY SUMMER VACATION,

I PLANNED TO SPEND TWO MONTHS IN ONE OF MY GRANDMOTHER'S STUDIOS, IN ORDER TO WORK ON THE PAGES I WAS PLANNING TO SEND TO A COMPETITION FOR YOUNG MANGAKAS.*

*MANGAKA: THE JAPANESE WORD FOR A COMIC BOOK ARTIST OR CARTOONIST WHO MAKES MANGA.

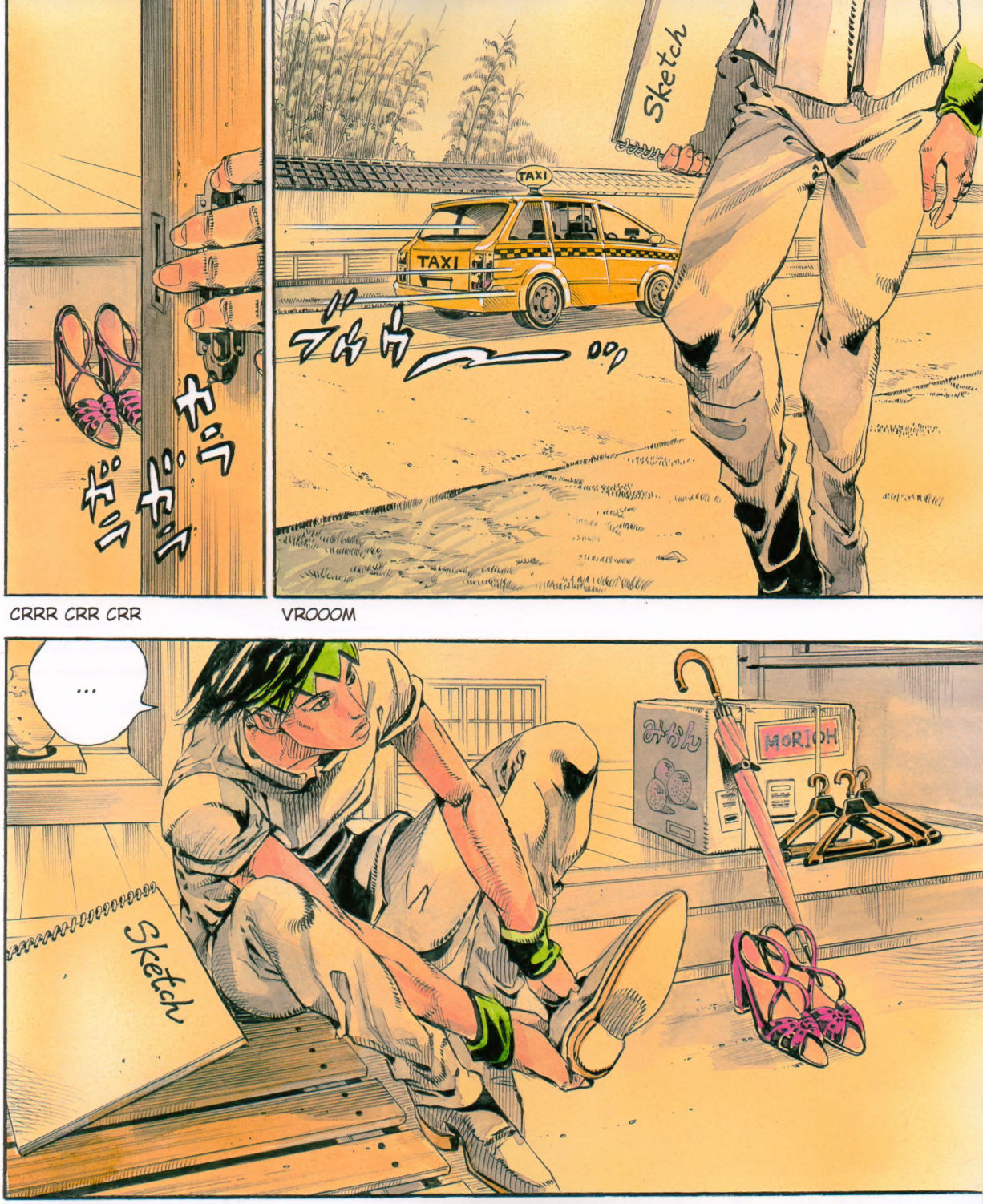
MY GRANDMOTHER HAD HER REQUIREMENTS, WITH RESPECT TO FUTURE TENANTS. HER CONDITIONS FOR ADMISSION WERE THE FOLLOWING: IT WAS NOT ALLOWED:

- TO SMOKE;
- TO RAISE ANY SORT OF ANIMAL;
- TO COOK;
- TO PLAY ANY SORT OF INSTRUMENT, AS WELL AS MAH-JONG;
- TO BRING ANY KIND OF FURNITURE;
- TO USE A HAIRDRYER;
- TO USE A MOTORCYCLE.

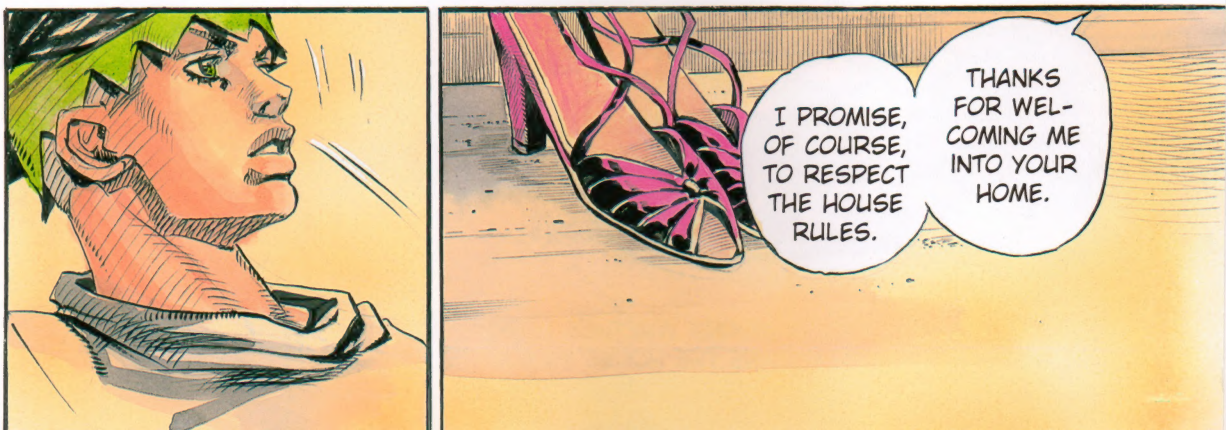
COUPLES WERE NOT ALLOWED, NOT TO MENTION CHILDREN. THE DOORS WERE CLOSED AT 10 P.M. YOU'D HAVE THOUGHT YOU WERE SUBJECTED TO A REAL CURFEW!

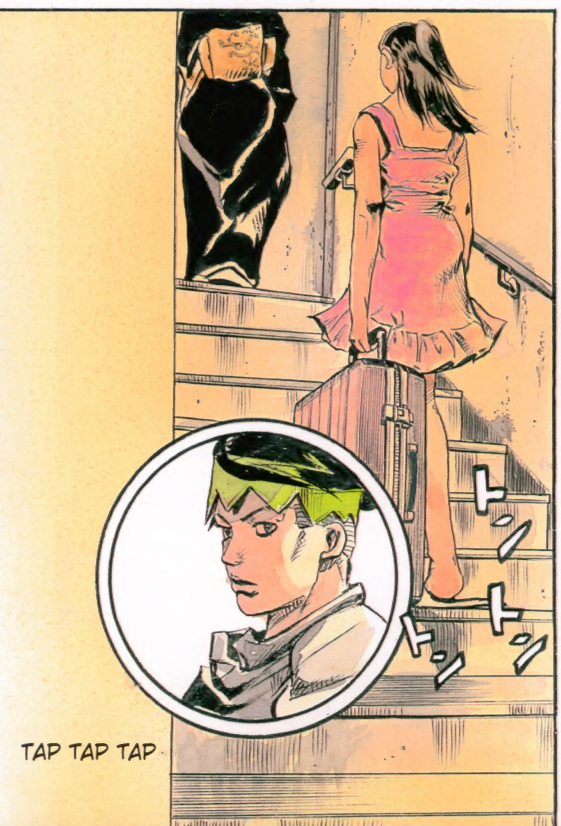
THERE'S NO USE ASKING WHETHER THERE WERE MANY PEOPLE: YOU CAN IMAGINE THE HOUSE WAS NEARLY EMPTY.

THE VERY ANCIENT INN WAS LOCATED PRETTY FAR FROM THE TRAIN STATION. EVER SINCE I WAS A KID, I LOVED THAT HOUSE FOR ITS SOOTHING PEACEFULNESS, BUT ESPECIALLY BECAUSE THE HOT WATER USED THERE CAME FROM A NEARBY HOT SPRING.

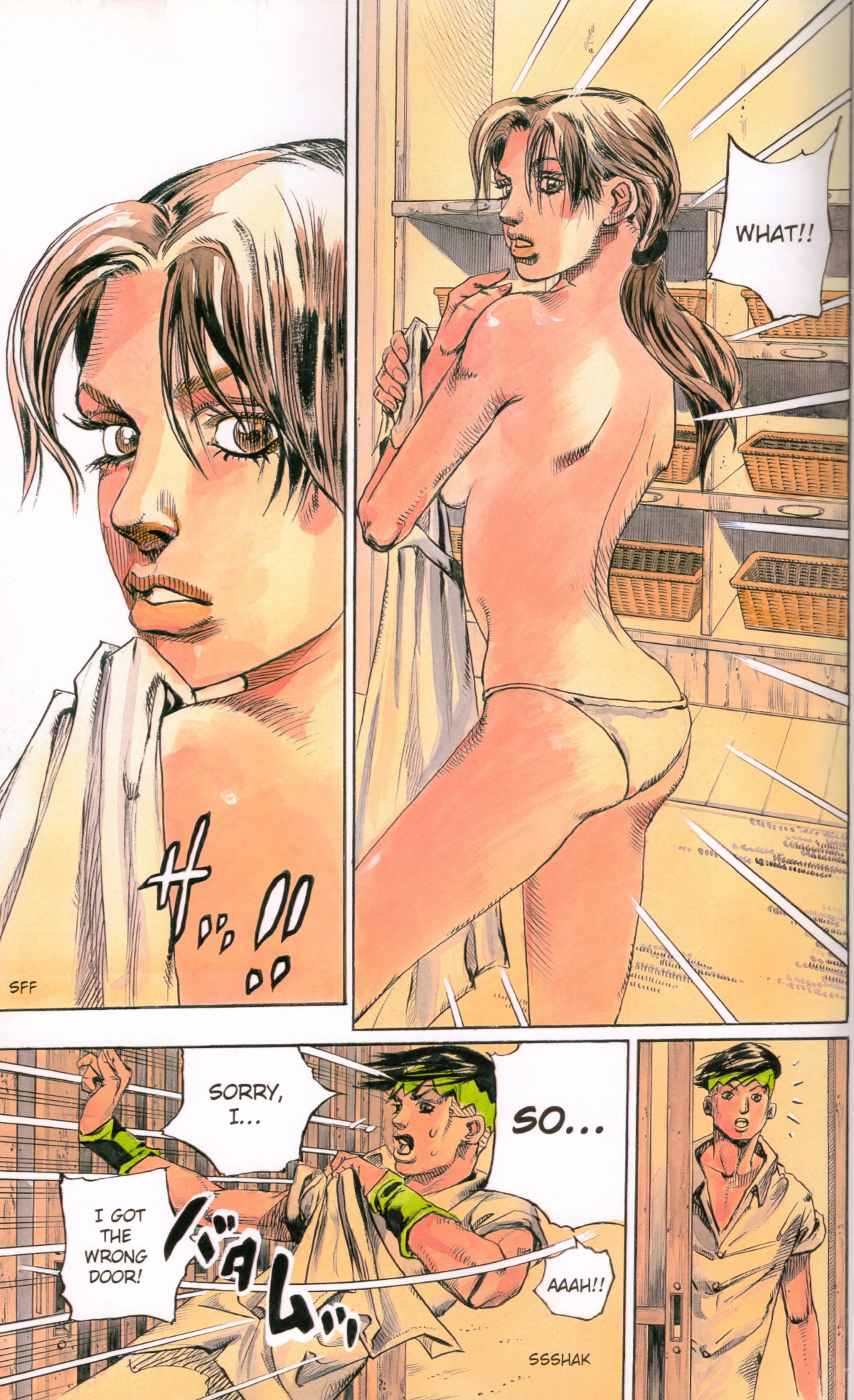

TAXI
TAXI
Sketch
CRRR CRR CRR
VROOOM

...
Sketch
MORIOH


I PROMISE, OF COURSE, TO RESPECT THE HOUSE RULES.
THANKS FOR WELCOMING ME INTO YOUR HOME.



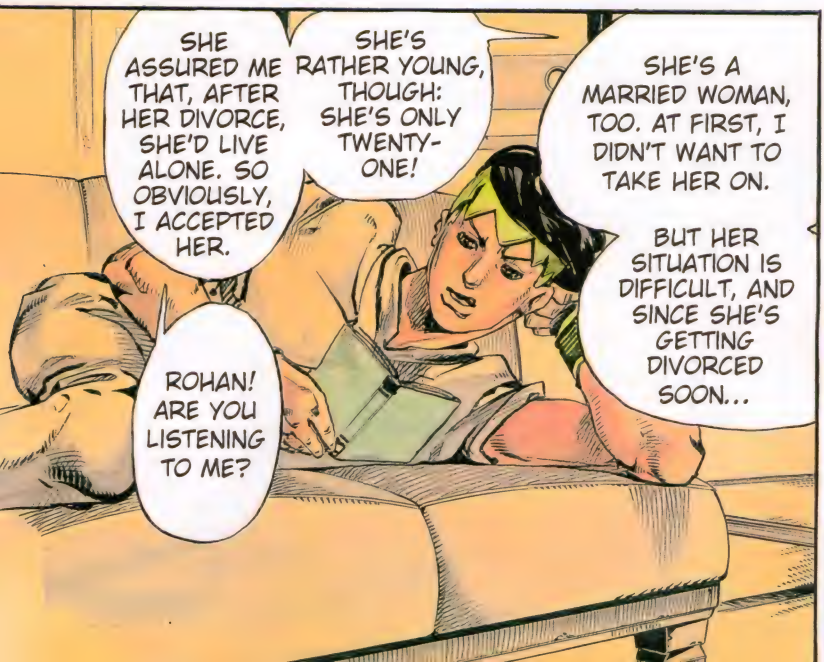
TAP TAP TAP


WHAT!!
SFF
SORRY, I...
I GOT THE WRONG DOOR!
SO...
AAAH!!
SSSHAK

CRRR CRR CRR

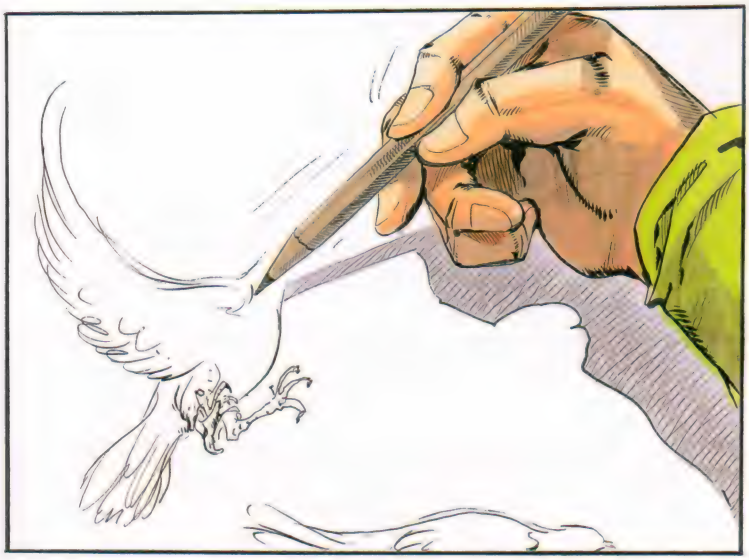
WHEW.
SILENCE
IS GRANDMA'S FAULT!
HER DIRECTIONS ARE SO COMPLICATED! WHY DID SHE PUT UP DRAWINGS OF OLD HAIRDOS?
IT WOULD HAVE BEEN SIMPLER TO MARK "MEN" AND "WOMEN"!
ALL THAT...
ZWEEP
HM...
...
UH...
TAP TAP TAP
SHAC

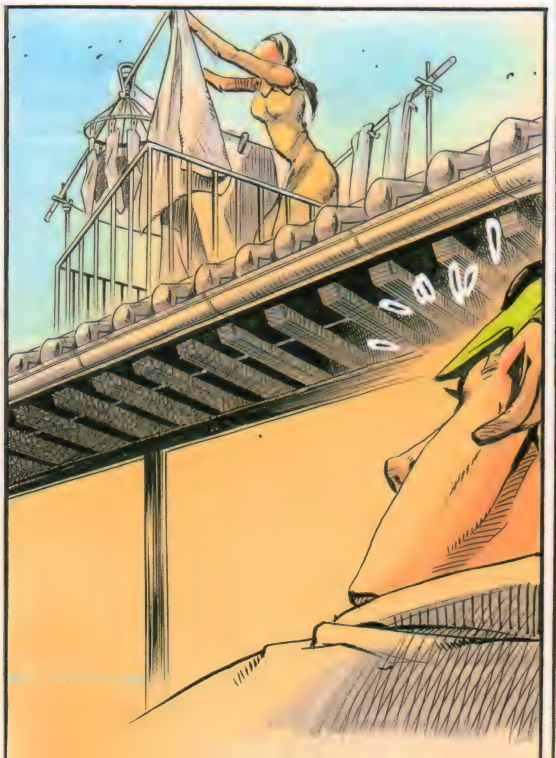
SAY...
ROHAN...
IF YOU EVER CATCH THAT WOMAN SMOKING, YOU LET ME KNOW RIGHT AWAY, OKAY?
WHAT WOMAN?
WHO ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

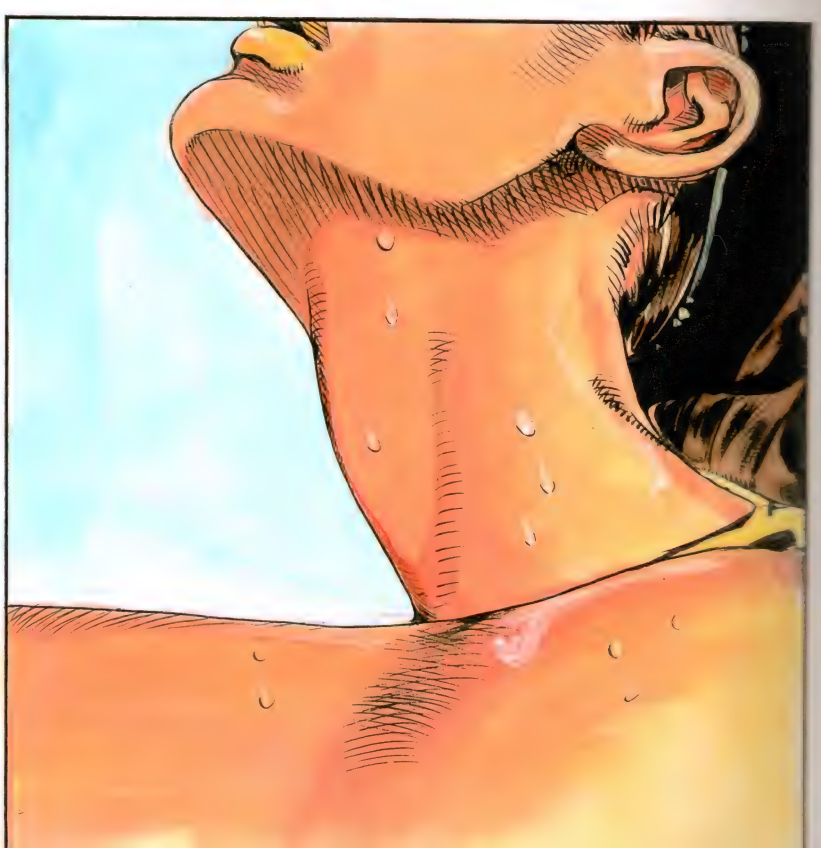

SHE ASSURED ME THAT, AFTER HER DIVORCE, SHE'D LIVE ALONE. SO OBVIOUSLY, I ACCEPTED HER.
SHE'S RATHER YOUNG, THOUGH: SHE'S ONLY TWENTY-ONE!
SHE'S A MARRIED WOMAN, TOO. AT FIRST, I DIDN'T WANT TO TAKE HER ON.
BUT HER SITUATION IS DIFFICULT, AND SINCE SHE'S GETTING DIVORCED SOON...
ROHAN! ARE YOU LISTENING TO ME?

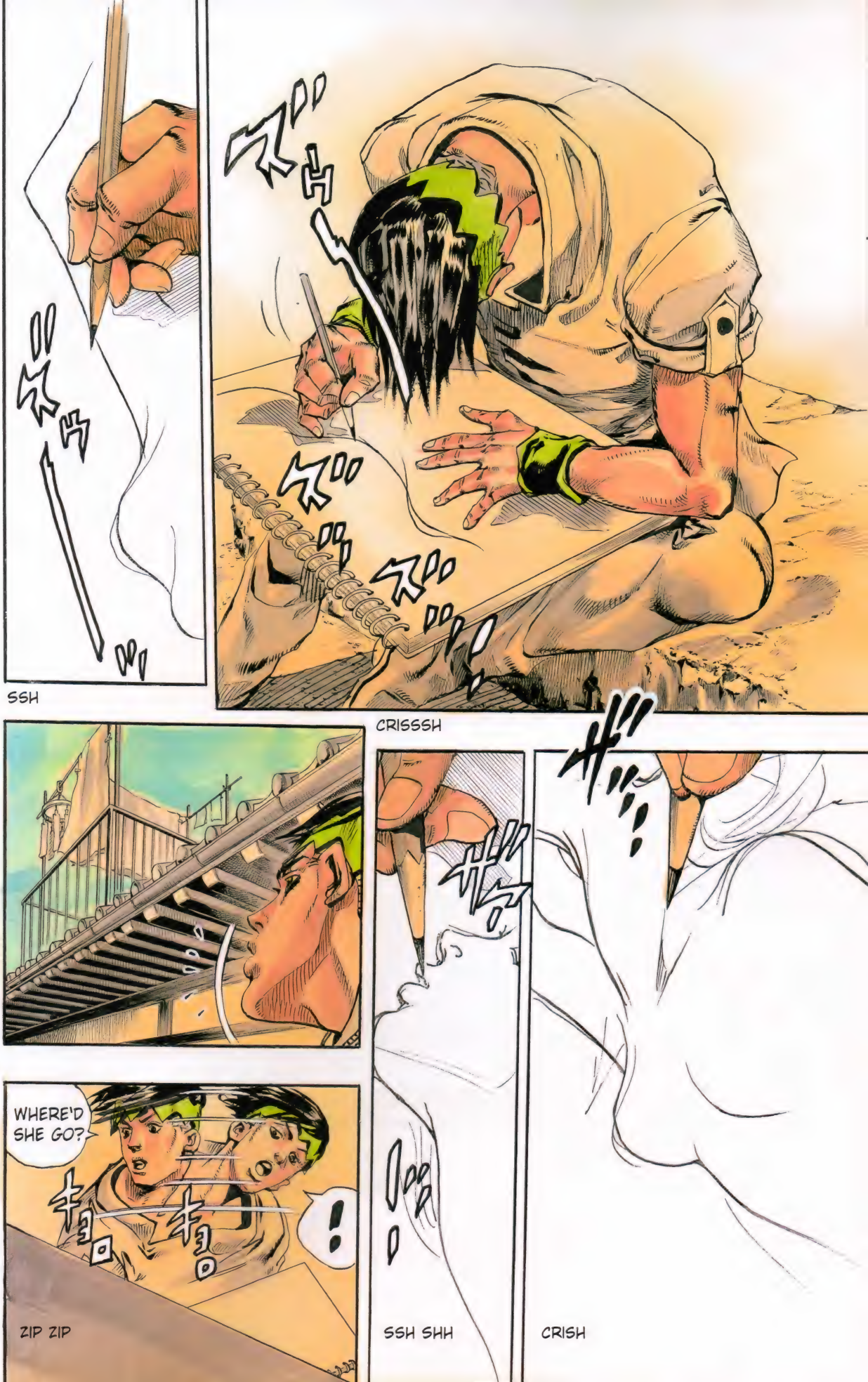
ABOUT MRS. NANASE FUJIKURA.
THE ONE WHO JUST ARRIVED.
...OH!
SO HER NAME IS NANASE.

TWEET-TWEET

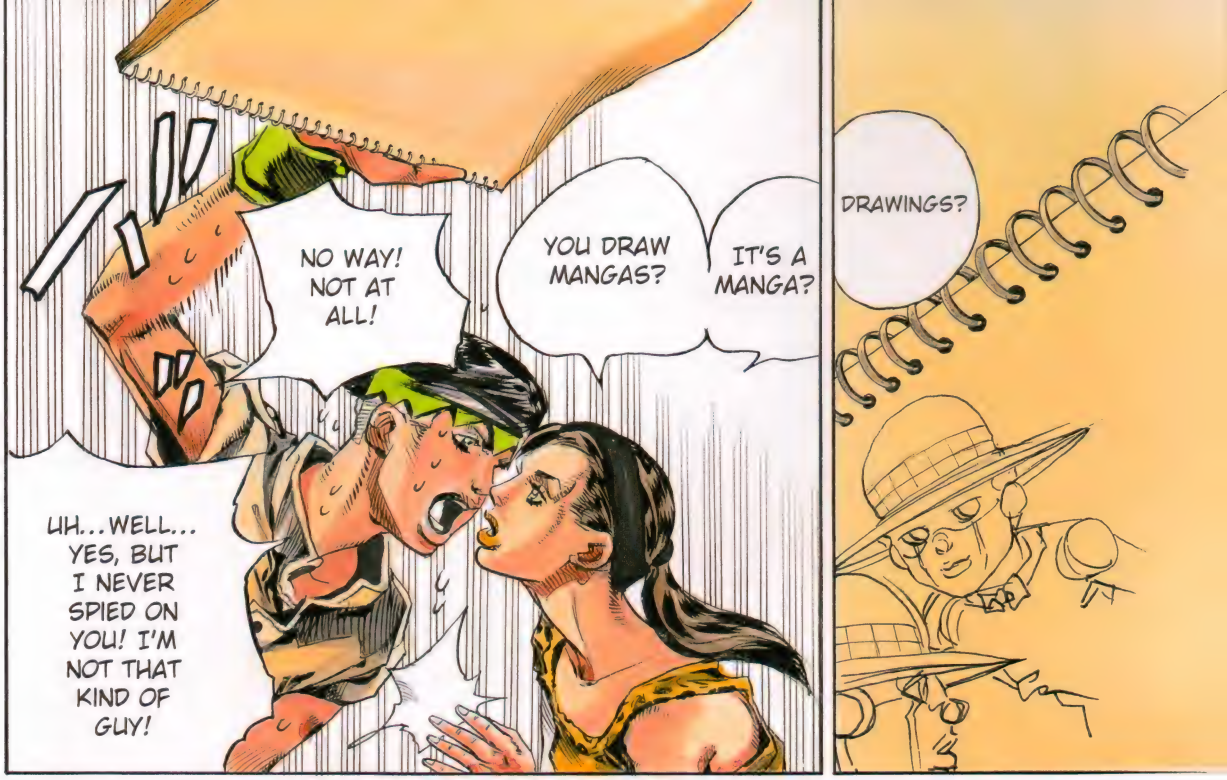




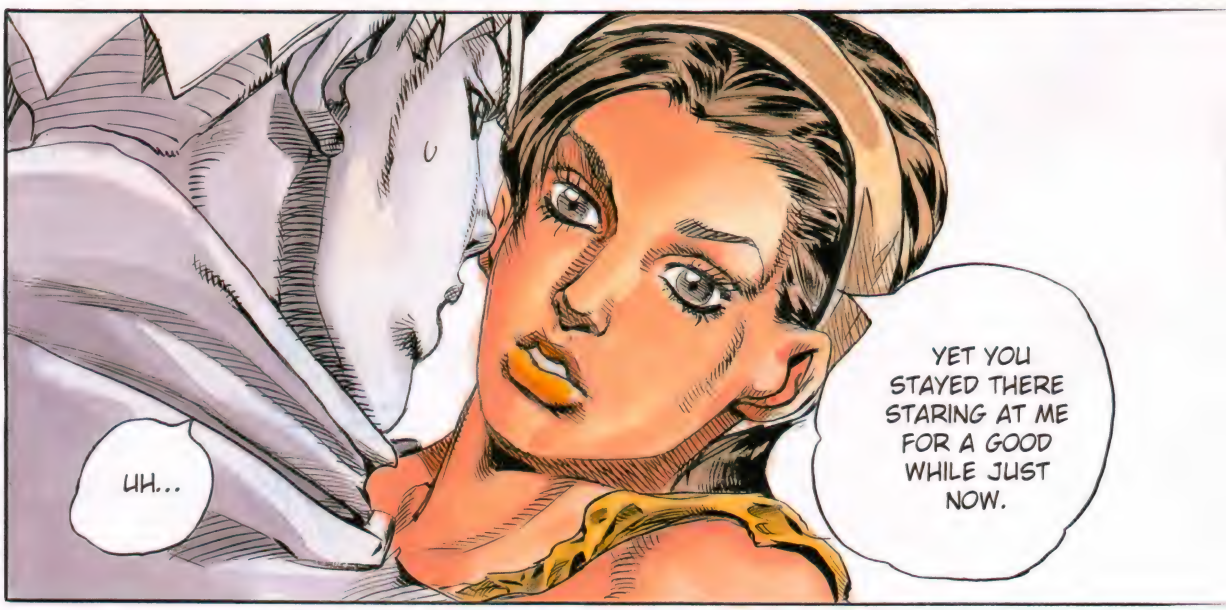


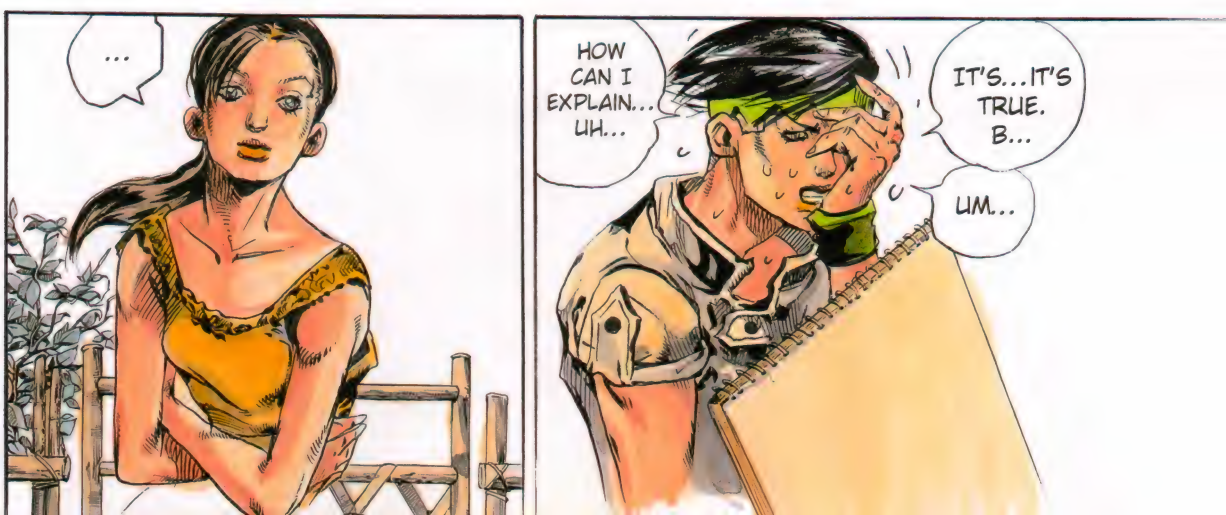

SSH
CRISSSH
WHERE'D SHE GO?
!
ZIP ZIP
SSH SHH
CRISH

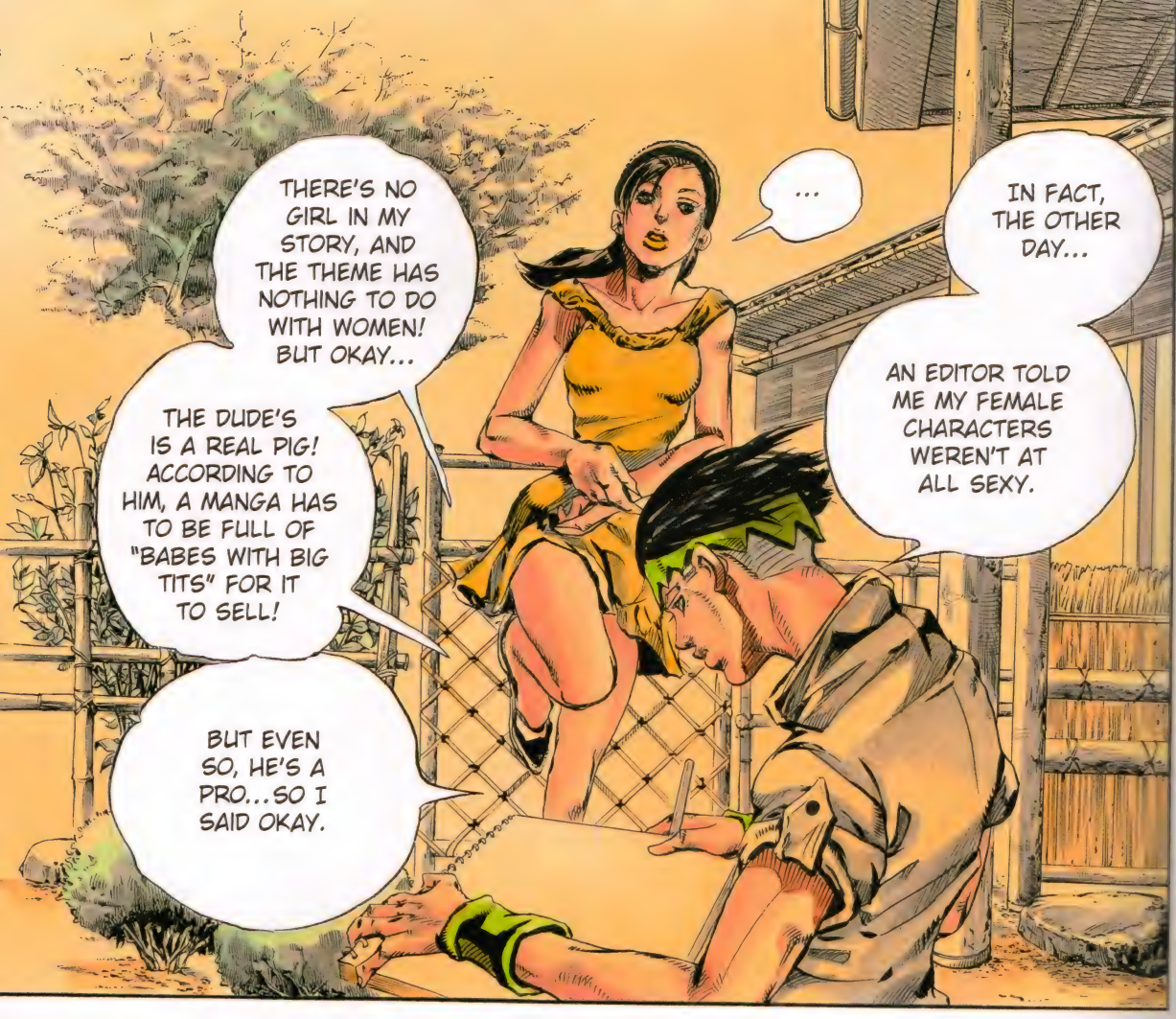
YOU LOOKING FOR ME?
HUH?
ARE YOU SPY-ING ON ME?
WHAT'S THIS?
HEY!
NO! STOP!!
SWISH
WHAT IS IT?
BUT...
NO!
I SAID GIVE IT BACK! YOU'VE NO RIGHT TO LOOK! IT'S MINE!!
IT'S NOT WHAT YOU... GIMME BACK MY DRAWING PAD!
FLAP FLAP

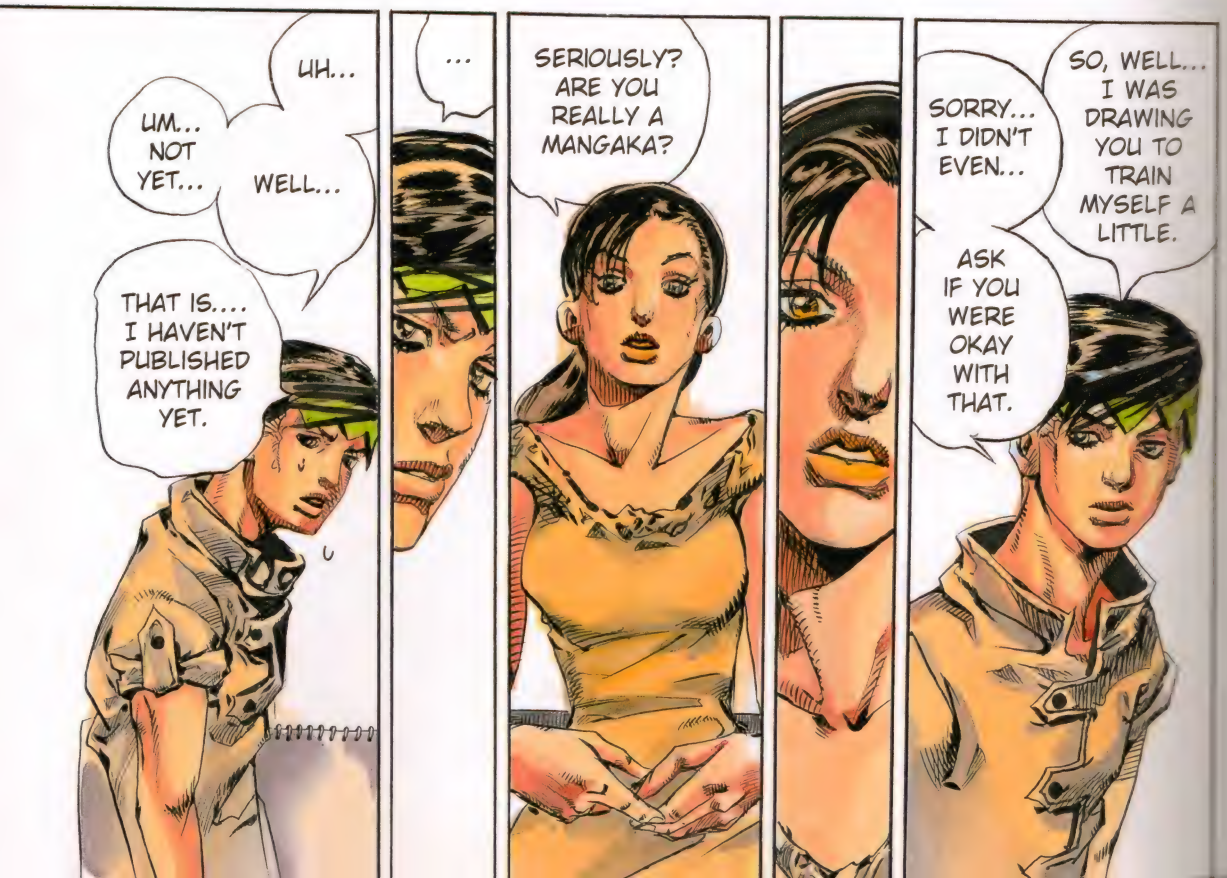

NO WAY! NOT AT ALL!
YOU DRAW MANGAS?
IT'S A MANGA?
DRAWINGS?
UH...WELL... YES, BUT I NEVER SPIED ON YOU! I'M NOT THAT KIND OF GUY!

SLAF


UH...
YET YOU STAYED THERE STARING AT ME FOR A GOOD WHILE JUST NOW.


...
HOW CAN I EXPLAIN... UH...
IT'S...IT'S TRUE. B...
UM...


IN FACT, THE OTHER DAY...
...
AN EDITOR TOLD ME MY FEMALE CHARACTERS WEREN'T AT ALL SEXY.
THERE'S NO GIRL IN MY STORY, AND THE THEME HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH WOMEN! BUT OKAY...
THE DUDE'S IS A REAL PIG! ACCORDING TO HIM, A MANGA HAS TO BE FULL OF "BABES WITH BIG TITS" FOR IT TO SELL!
BUT EVEN SO, HE'S A PRO...SO I SAID OKAY.


SO, WELL... I WAS DRAWING YOU TO TRAIN MYSELF A LITTLE.
SORRY... I DIDN'T EVEN...
ASK IF YOU WERE OKAY WITH THAT.
SERIOUSLY? ARE YOU REALLY A MANGAKA?
...
UH...
UM... NOT YET...
WELL...
THAT IS.... I HAVEN'T PUBLISHED ANYTHING YET.

THAT'S NOT THE SORT OF QUESTION YOU ASK A BEGINNER, DON'T YOU THINK?
OH YES? AND YOU THINK YOU CAN MAKE A LIVING THAT WAY SOME DAY?
TAP TAP
THEY REALLY SHOW SOMETHING...
YOUR DRAWINGS...
LISTEN, I DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT IT, BUT...
I'D REALLY LIKE TO READ YOUR MANGA ONCE YOU'VE FINISHED. YOU OKAY WITH THAT?
TAP

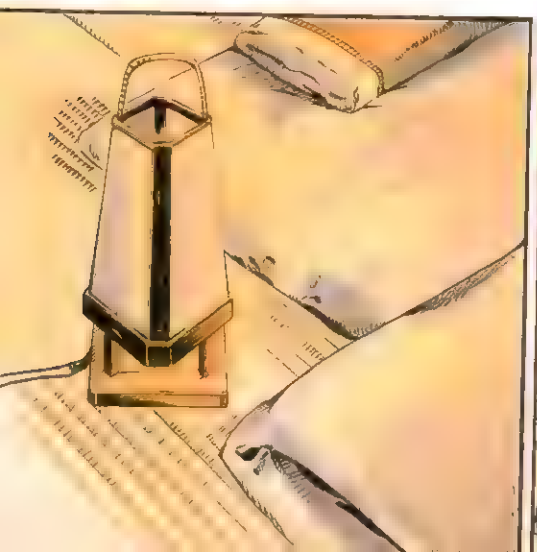
HELLO.
I THOUGHT YOU WERE IN BED.
DO YOU HAVE ANYTHING TO SHOW ME?
OH, HELLO.
UH....
CRRR CRR CRRRR
WHAT'S THAT ENVELOPE?
CAN I SEE?
HUH?!
NO, IT'S NOT FINISHED YET. I HAVE UNTIL SEPTEMBER TO SUBMIT IT.
FTT
YOUR MANGA, COME ON! YOU PROMISED!
SHOW WHAT?
TO SHOW YOU?
THE OTHER DAY, YOU TOLD ME YOU'D SHOW IT TO ME!
UH...
?
...

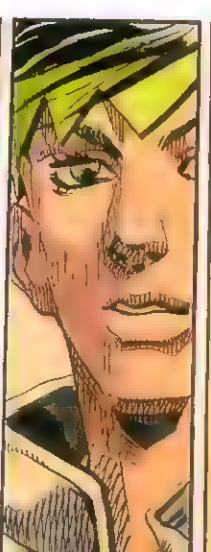
楓
ALL RIGHT, COME IN!
カラ!
IT DOESN'T MATTER!
I'M IN TOO MUCH A HURRY TO READ IT!

CRRR

UH...

...





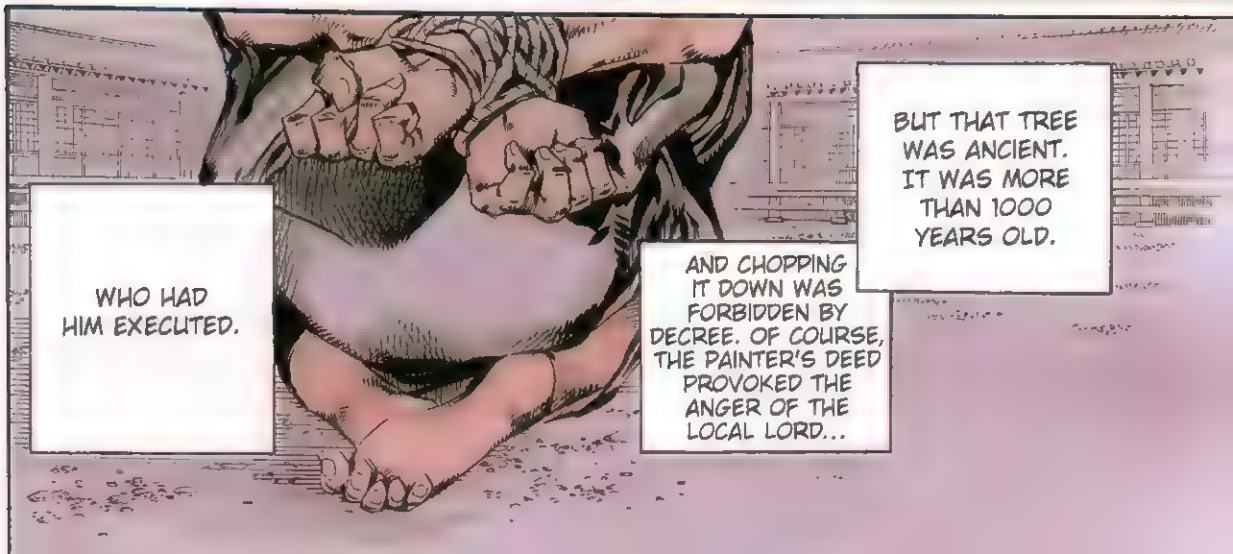
HAVE A SEAT.

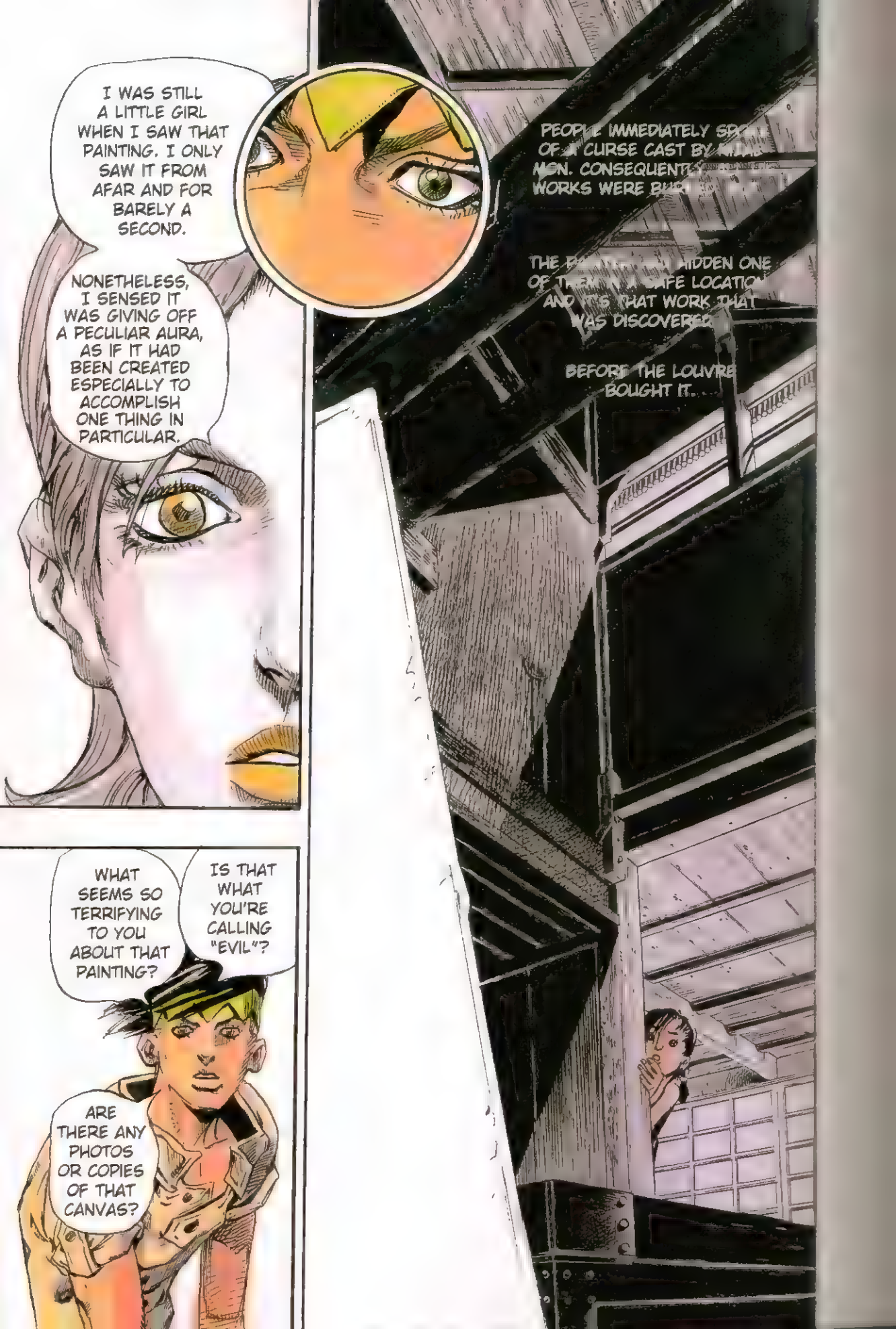
SEE YOU TOMOR-ROW?
I'D RATHER GO.
EXCUSE ME, BUT...
...
I JUST WANT TO SEE YOUR SKETCHES. YOU PUT SUCH ENERGY INTO THEM!
WHAT ARE YOU AFRAID OF? I HAVE NO INTENTION OF CRITICIZING YOUR WORK. I DON'T HAVE AN EYE, IN ANY CASE. I'M A TOTAL NOVICE WITH ART!
AND... THEY SEEM SO REAL.

TELL ME...
ARE YOU FAMILIAR WITH THE DARKEST PAINTING IN THE WORLD?
THE MOST HARMFUL, THE MOST TERRIBLE...
YOU KNOW WHAT? I'M A LITTLE JEALOUS.
MY DRAWINGS?
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT NOW?
OF COURSE NOT!
IT'S JUST A QUESTION.
YOU KNOW, MOST PEOPLE CONSIDER LEONARDO DA VINCI'S MONA LISA THE MOST BEAUTIFUL PAINTING IN THE WORLD.

BUT THAT PAINTING EXISTS. IT'S IN PARIS, AT THE LOUVRE.
I REALLY THINK THAT'S SO IN EVERY COUNTRY, BUT WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT IS A PAINTING THAT'S THE OPPOSITE OF THE MONA LISA'S BEAUTY.
DID YOU HEAR ABOUT IT?
IT'S THE MOST EVIL PAINTING.
...
WELL, NO. I DIDN'T KNOW A PAINTING COULD BE LIKE THAT.
SO, THAT PICTURE...
WAS PAINTED IN JAPAN?
A LANDOWNER IN MY HOMETOWN FOUND IT IN THE BACK OF HIS BARN.
AND THEN A CURATOR FROM THE LOUVRE TOOK IT TO THE MUSEUM.
I SAW IT WHEN I WAS A KID.

ACCORDING TO LEGEND, AROUND 300 YEARS AGO, NIZAEMON DISCOVERED A PIGMENT OF A HITHERTO UNKNOWN BLACKNESS.
YES. THE PAINTER'S NAME WAS NIZAEMON YAMAMURA.
CURIOUSLY, THAT PIGMENT WAS ALSO EXCEPTIONALLY LUSTROUS. THE ARTIST HAD USED IT FOR SEVERAL OF HIS WORKS.
HE ALONE KNEW OF THAT PIGMENT'S EXISTENCE, WHICH HE'D EXTRACTED FROM A TREE TRUNK.


WHO HAD HIM EXECUTED.
AND CHOPPING IT DOWN WAS FORBIDDEN BY DECREE. OF COURSE, THE PAINTER'S DEED PROVOKED THE ANGER OF THE LOCAL LORD...
BUT THAT TREE WAS ANCIENT. IT WAS MORE THAN 1000 YEARS OLD.


I WAS STILL A LITTLE GIRL WHEN I SAW THAT PAINTING. I ONLY SAW IT FROM AFAR AND FOR BARELY A SECOND.
NONETHELESS, I SENSED IT WAS GIVING OFF A PECULIAR AURA, AS IF IT HAD BEEN CREATED ESPECIALLY TO ACCOMPLISH ONE THING IN PARTICULAR.
PEOPLE IMMEDIATELY SPO
OF A CURSE CAST BY
MEN. CONSEQUENTLY
WORKS WERE BU
THE
OF T
AND
WAS DISCOVERED
BEFORE THE LOUVRE
BOUGHT IT...
WHAT SEEMS SO TERRIFYING TO YOU ABOUT THAT PAINTING?
IS THAT WHAT YOU'RE CALLING "EVIL"?
ARE THERE ANY PHOTOS OR COPIES OF THAT CANVAS?

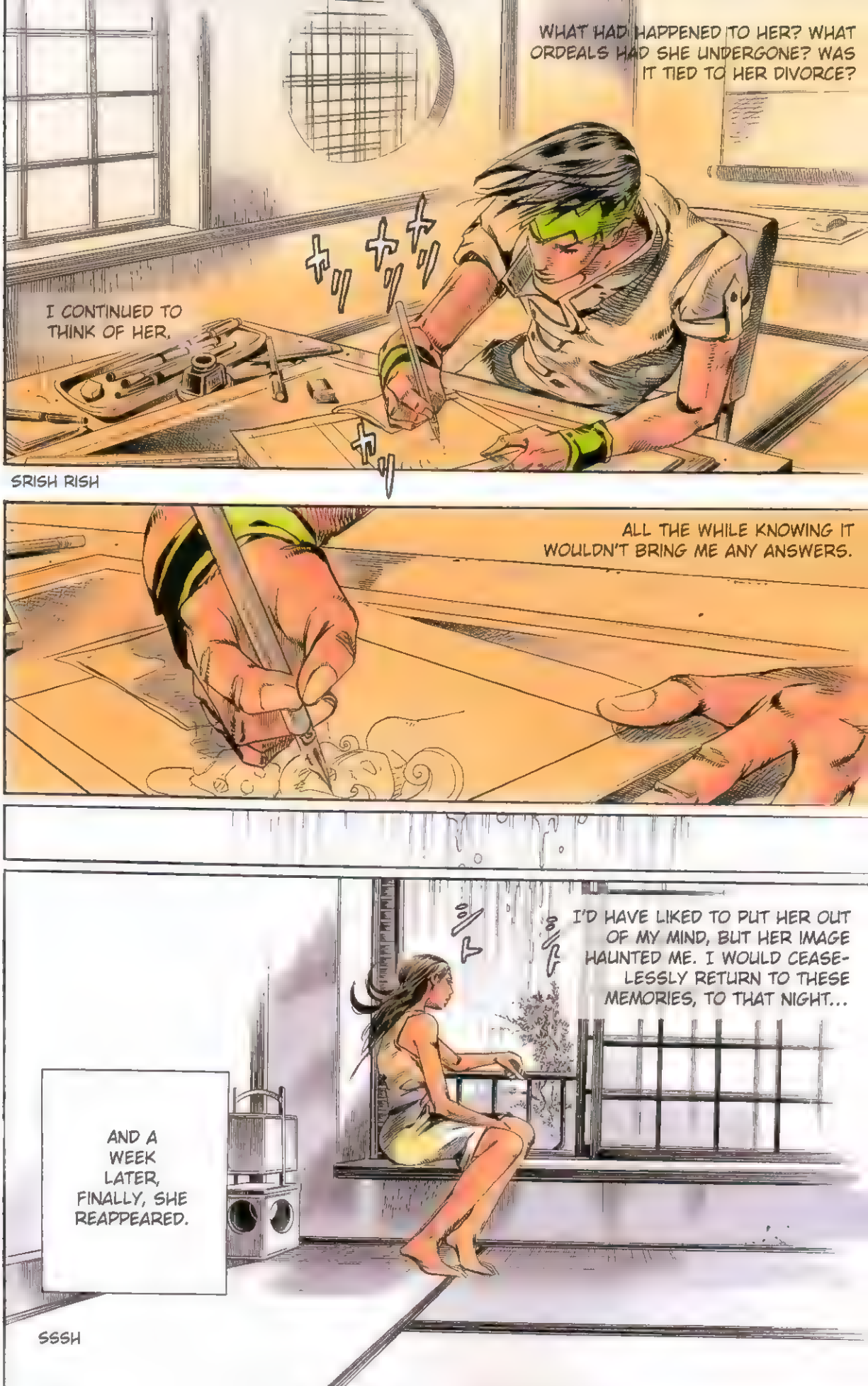
?
HUH?
BUT...
THANKS FOR THIS CONVERSATION, AND ALSO FOR YOUR DRAWINGS.
IT'S LATE. YOU SHOULD GO SLEEP.
THAT...
HELLO?
YES.
OKAY.
I HAVE TO ANSWER.
MY PHONE.
OH...
TWEEE
TWEEE

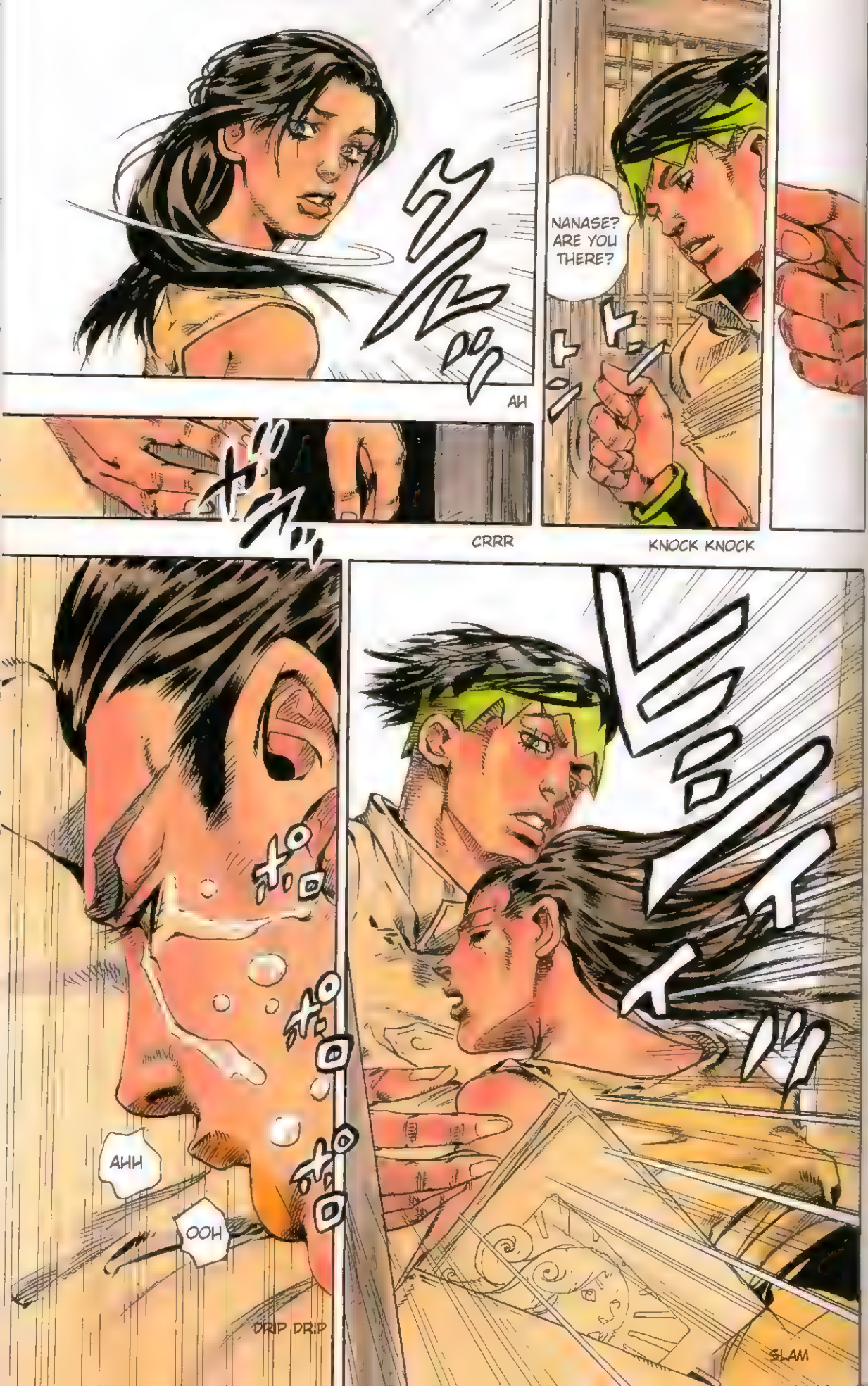
I DON'T WANT TO.
NO!
WAIT! THAT'S NOT...
OOOOH...
NO.
OOOH...
OOOOH...
NO... NO!
LEAVE ONE ANOTHER? NO, NOT THAT...
ハッ
YOU'RE... YOU'RE SPYING NOW?!
TAF SHAA
ARE YOU OKAY?
UH...
?
ナニ!!
GRRR

DRIP DRIP DRIP DRIP
OH!
BAM!
...
TAP TAP TAP TAP TAP

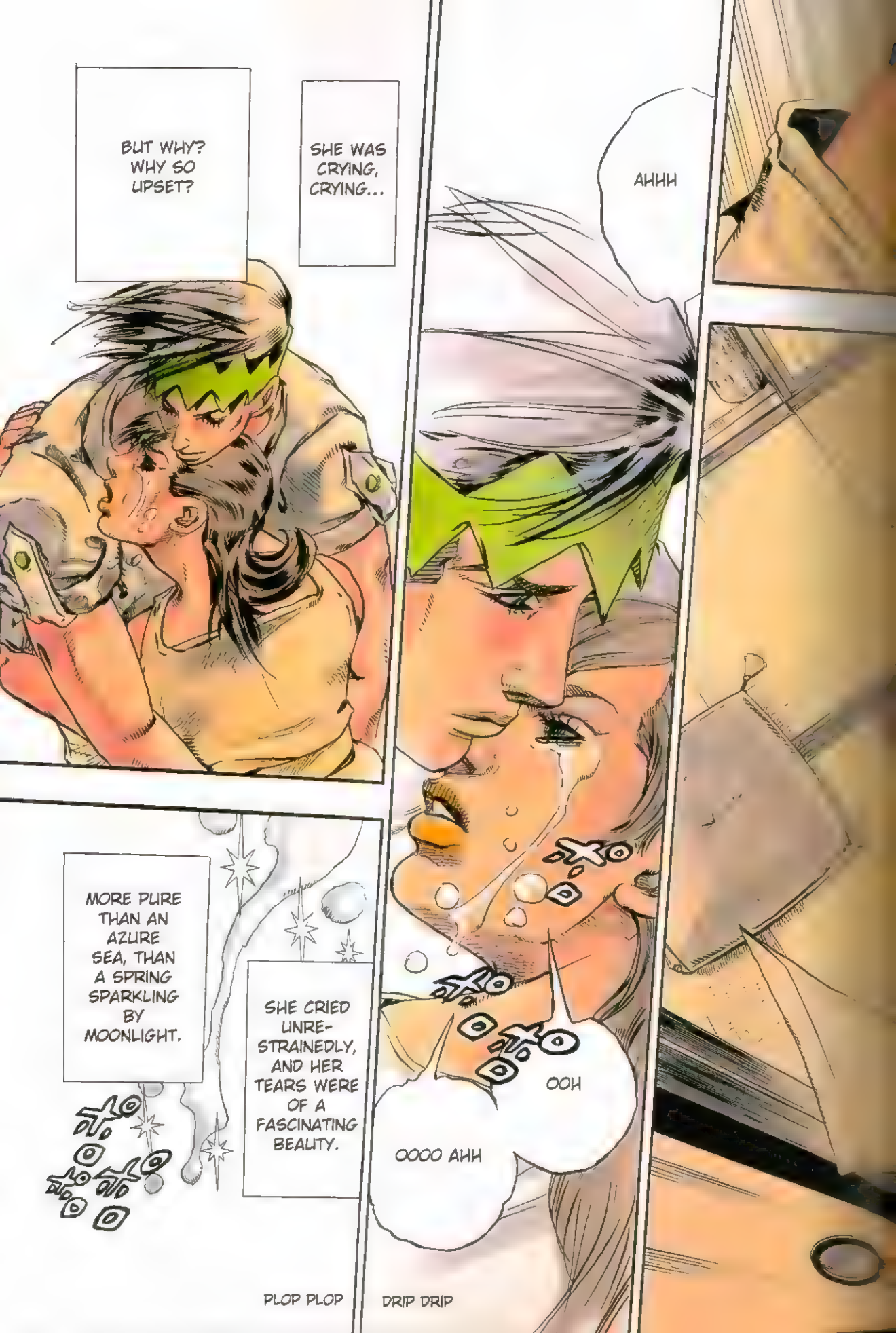
WHERE ARE YOU?
IS THAT NEARBY?
AHH...
WHERE ...? ANSWER ME!
PLEASE COME! I KNOW YOU'RE NOT FAR AWAY!

SHE DISAPPEARED INTO THE NIGHT.
THAT WAS HOW...

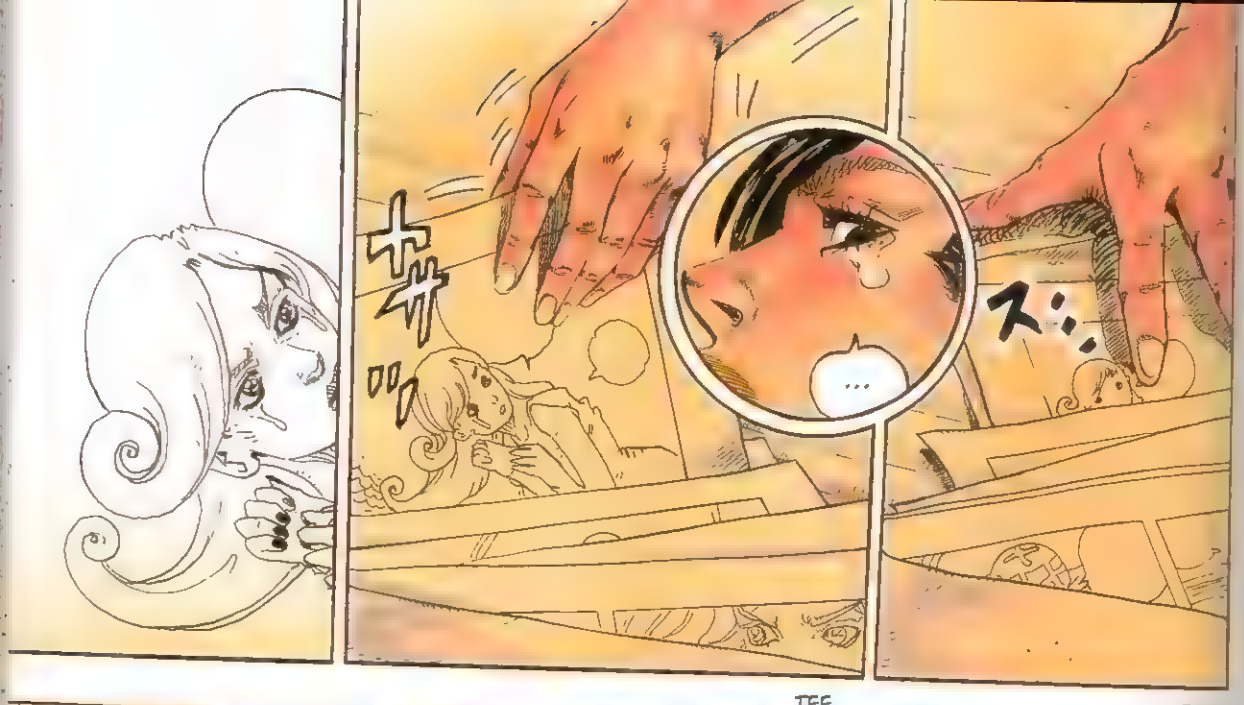

WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO HER? WHAT ORDEALS HAD SHE UNDERGONE? WAS IT TIED TO HER DIVORCE?
I CONTINUED TO THINK OF HER.
SRISH RISH
ALL THE WHILE KNOWING IT WOULDN'T BRING ME ANY ANSWERS.
I'D HAVE LIKED TO PUT HER OUT OF MY MIND, BUT HER IMAGE HAUNTED ME. I WOULD CEASELESSLY RETURN TO THESE MEMORIES, TO THAT NIGHT...
AND A WEEK LATER, FINALLY, SHE REAPPEARED.
SSSH

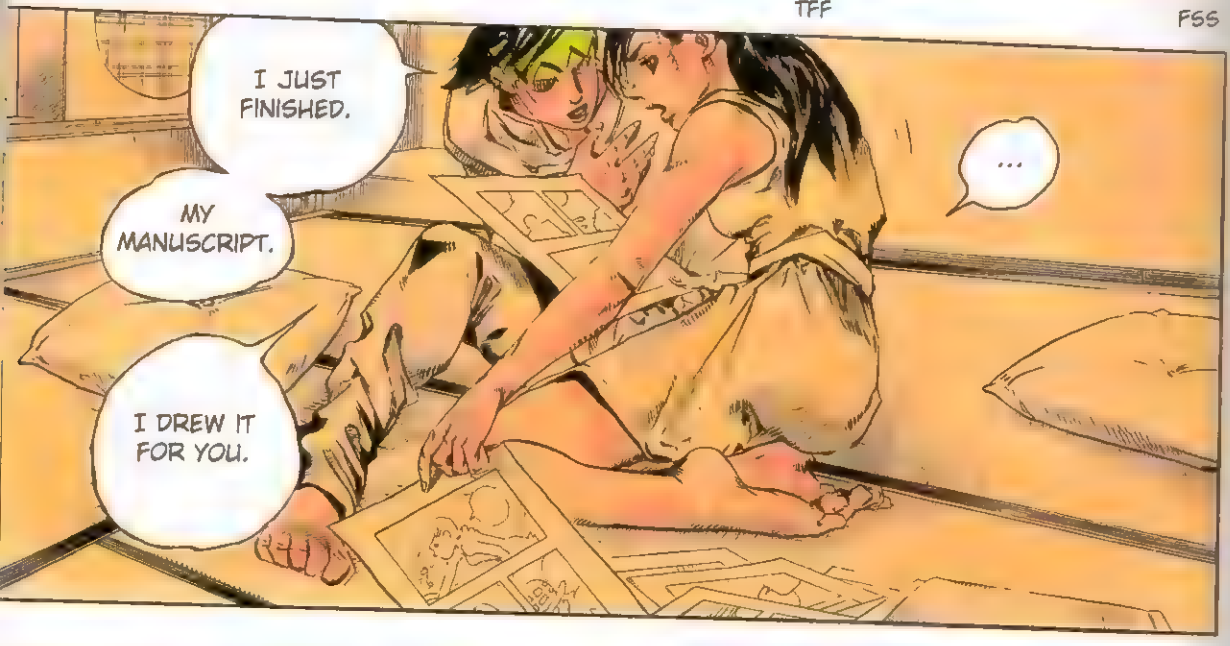

NANASE? ARE YOU THERE?
KNOCK KNOCK
AH
CRRR
AHH
OOH
DRIP DRIP
SLAM

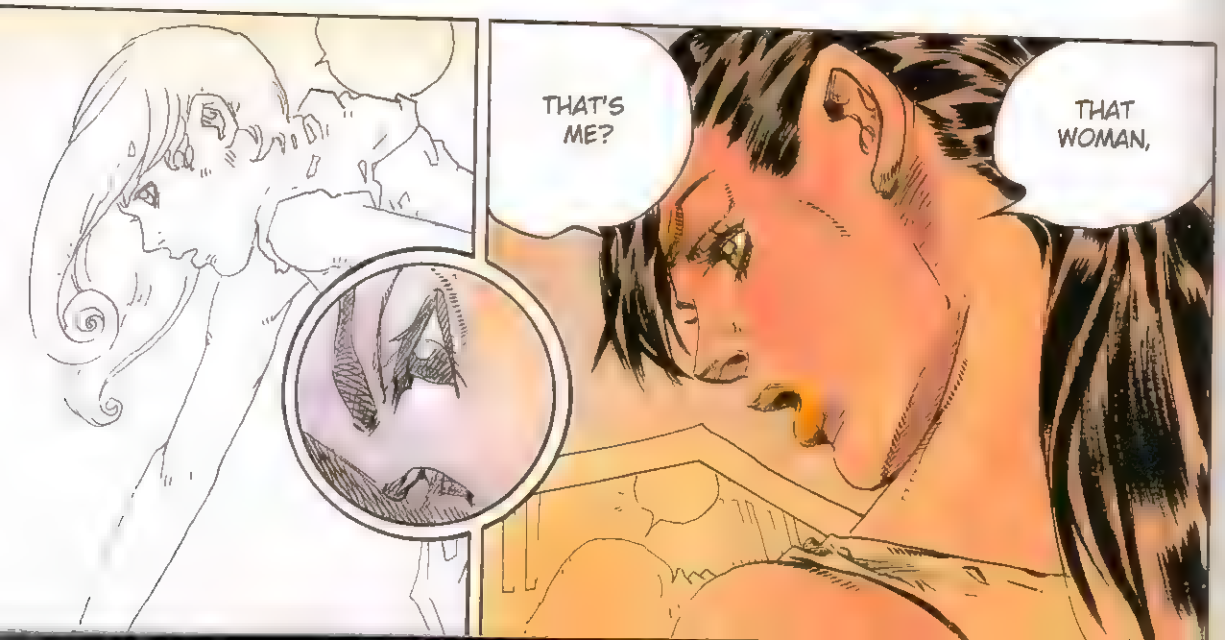
ROHAN!
ビメァァ!!
FLOP


BUT WHY? WHY SO UPSET?
SHE WAS CRYING, CRYING...
AHHH
MORE PURE THAN AN AZURE SEA, THAN A SPRING SPARKLING BY MOONLIGHT.
SHE CRIED UNRE-STRAINEDLY, AND HER TEARS WERE OF A FASCINATING BEAUTY.
OOH
OOOO AHH
PLOP PLOP
DRIP DRIP

LET ME HELP YOU.
THERE'S NO NEED TO GO FAR AWAY, YOU CAN STAY RIGHT HERE.
I'LL PROTECT YOU FROM EVERY FEAR.. FROM EVERY FEAR..
TSSS
NOT LIKE THAT.
FLAP FLAP
NO.
TO DISCOVER THE ORIGIN OF HER TEARS,
I DON'T WANT TO...
I WON'T READ INTO HER HEART WITHOUT HER KNOWING.
NO.
SSST

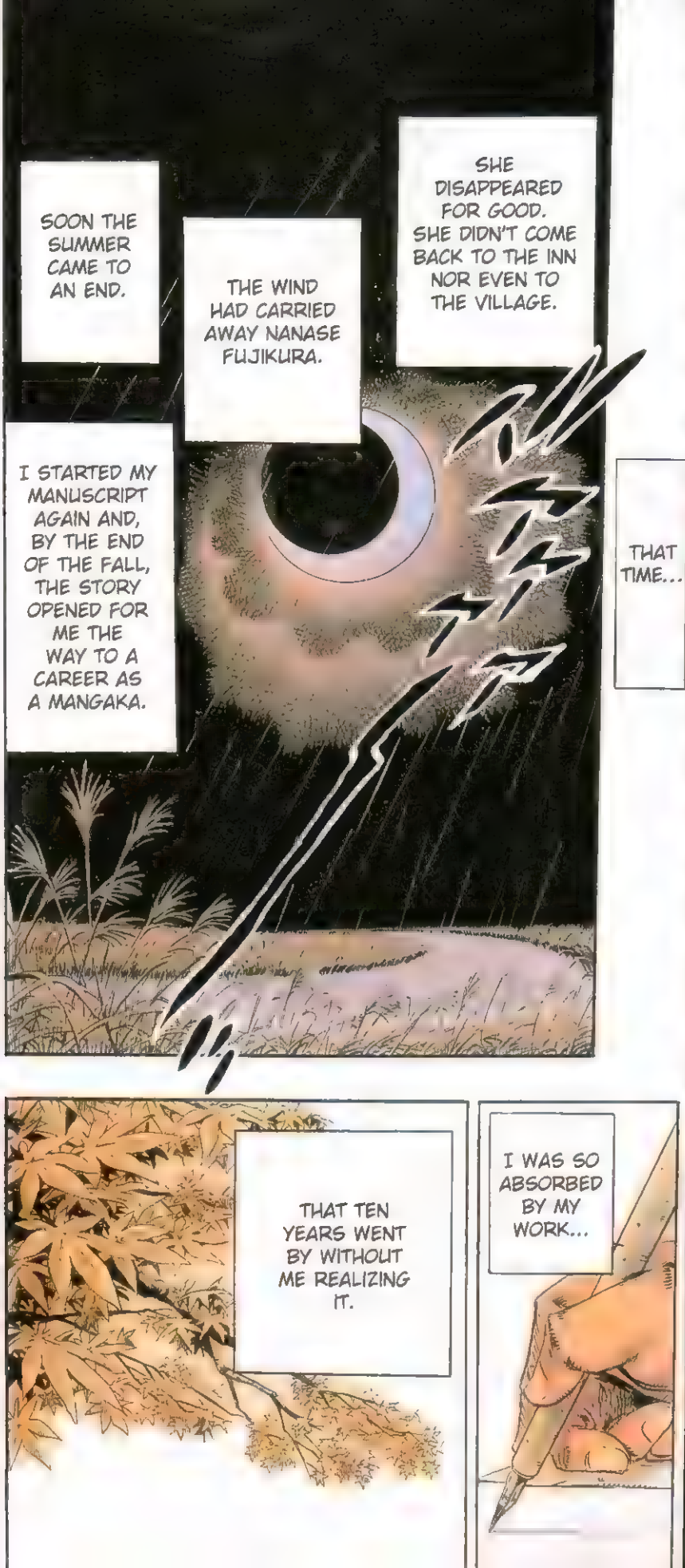

...
TFF
FSS


I JUST FINISHED.
MY MANUSCRIPT.
I DREW IT FOR YOU.
...


THAT'S ME?
THAT WOMAN,

HUH?
IT MAKES NO SENSE! WHY DID YOU DO THAT?! REALLY, IT'S RIDICULOUS!
YOU DREW ME IN YOUR MANGA?!
BUT WHY?!
PLAF
WHY DID YOU DO THAT? IT'S TOTALLY LUDICROUS!
IT'S CRAP! CRAP, CRAP, CRAP!
SMASH SMASH SMASH SMASH

SMASSH
STTP
OOOO
...
IT'S SO...
SO STUPID.
OOO... BOOO
AHH!
BOOOOO HOOOO
REALLY.
I'M SORRY.
ROHAN,
I... FORGIVE ME... SORRY... FOR EVERYTHING.


SOON THE SUMMER CAME TO AN END.
THE WIND HAD CARRIED AWAY NANASE FUJIKURA.
SHE DISAPPEARED FOR GOOD. SHE DIDN'T COME BACK TO THE INN NOR EVEN TO THE VILLAGE.
I STARTED MY MANUSCRIPT AGAIN AND, BY THE END OF THE FALL, THE STORY OPENED FOR ME THE WAY TO A CAREER AS A MANGAKA.
THAT TIME...
THAT TEN YEARS WENT BY WITHOUT ME REALIZING IT.
I WAS SO ABSORBED BY MY WORK...
SHAAA

ONE DAY, BY CHANCE, I REMEMBERED...
THE FAMOUS MYSTERY PAINTING.
...
COULD YOU CROSS YOUR ARMS IN FRONT OF YOU LIKE THAT?
PLEASE..
SO I CAN TAKE A PICTURE!
YES, LEONARDO DA VINCI'S MONA LISA! YOU DON'T AGREE?
IT'S THE MONA LISA.
AND I'VE REALIZED WHO IT WAS!
YOU'VE ALWAYS MADE ME THINK OF SOMEONE.
MR. KISHIBE!
BUT THAT'S A WOMAN! AND JUST A PAINTING!
WAIT!
WAIT, ARE YOU ANGRY?
HUH?
I'LL BE SEEING YOU.
THAT WAS A COMPLIMENT! I DIDN'T MEAN TO MAKE FUN OF YOU!
STAP
HIS NAME WAS... NIZAEMON YAMAMURA.
THAT REMINDS ME...

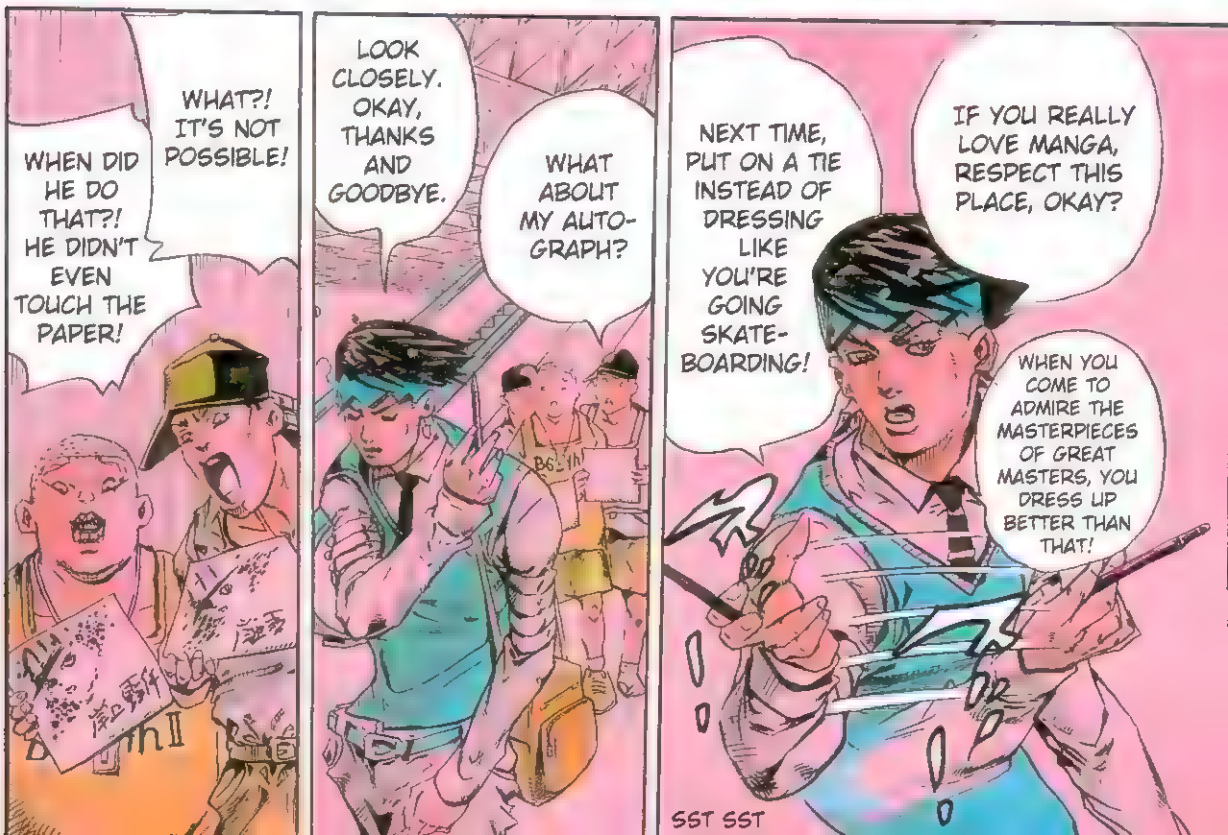
SÉE DU LOUVRE
HMM...
IS IT JUST CURIOSITY?
RRROOOH
Paris
FLIP

MUSÉE DU LOUV
LOUVRE
I MUST SEE...
THAT PAINTING.
WHY HESITATE?
OR IS
TO FIND
A SWEE
MEMORY
YOUTH?
SAF

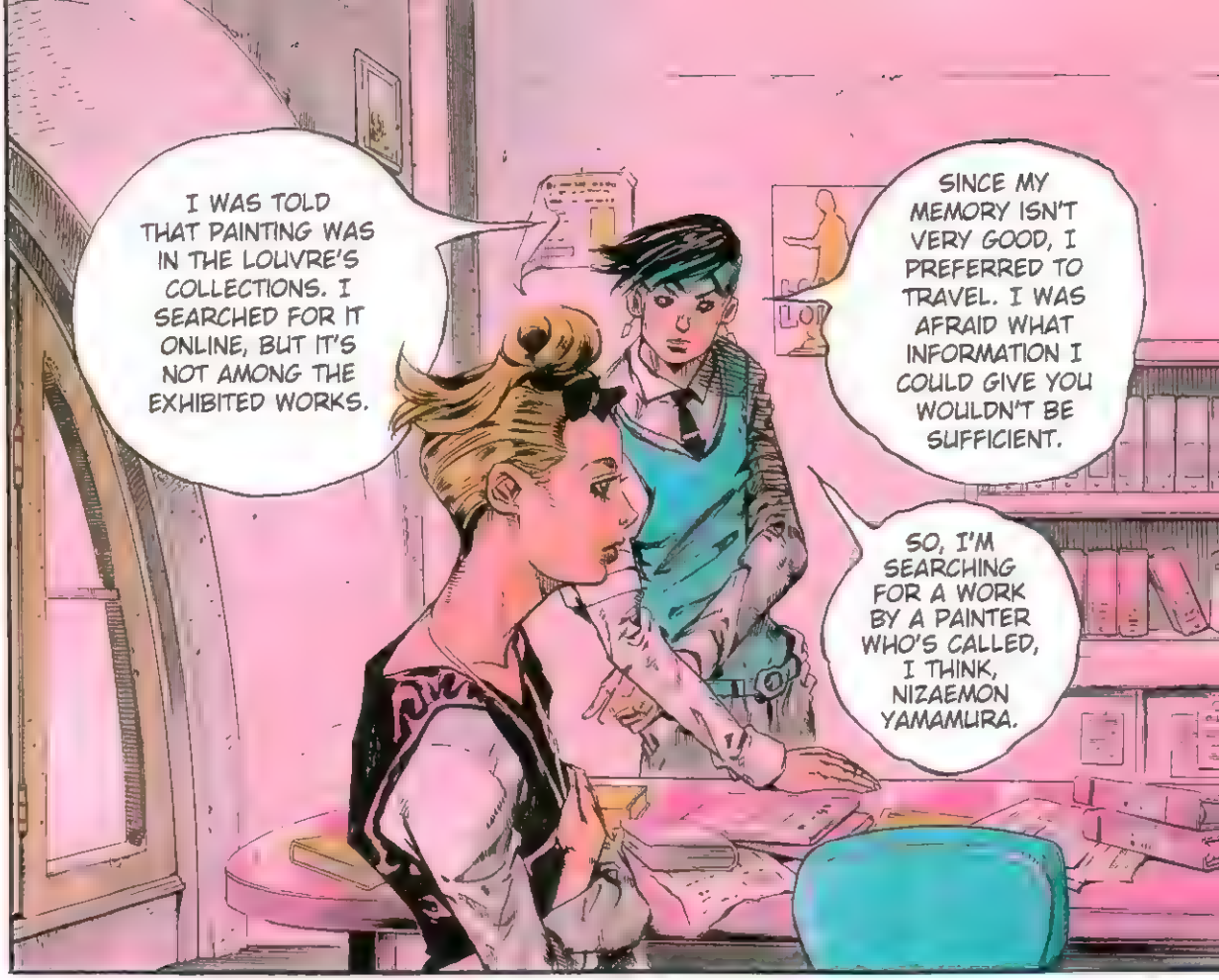
RRROOOHOO

HMM...
AUTO-GRAPH, PLEASE!
YES! THE MANGAKA!
AREN'T YOU ROHAN KISHIBE?
HEY! I KNOW YOU!
FOR ME, TOO!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN PARIS? SOME RESEARCH FOR YOUR NEXT SERIES?
IT'S INCREDIBLE SEEING YOU IN REAL LIFE!
SIGN THIS?
OF COURSE!
YEAH!
SO YOU LIKE MANGA THEN?
FOR MY GIRL-FRIEND!
HAVE YOU LOOKED AT YOUR GET-UP? DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOU LOOK LIKE?

BROUHAHA


WHEN DID HE DO THAT?! HE DIDN'T EVEN TOUCH THE PAPER!
WHAT?! IT'S NOT POSSIBLE!
LOOK CLOSELY. OKAY, THANKS AND GOODBYE.
WHAT ABOUT MY AUTO-GRAPH?
NEXT TIME, PUT ON A TIE INSTEAD OF DRESSING LIKE YOU'RE GOING SKATE-BOARDING!
IF YOU REALLY LOVE MANGA, RESPECT THIS PLACE, OKAY?
WHEN YOU COME TO ADMIRE THE MASTERPIECES OF GREAT MASTERS, YOU DRESS UP BETTER THAN THAT!
SST SST

HELLO, MR. KISHIBE.
I AM MISS NOGUCHI, AN INTERPRETER ATTACHED TO THE LOUVRE'S PUBLISHING DEPARTMENT. IT'S A PLEASURE TO MAKE YOUR ACQUAINTANCE.
THANK YOU FOR COMING SO FAR.
THE PLEASURE...
IS SHARED.
YOU SAY YOU'RE LOOKING FOR INFORMATION ON ONE OF OUR MUSEUM'S PIECES.
CON-CERNING YOUR REQUEST ...
RIGHT? WHICH WORK IS IT?
IT'S A PIECE BY A JAPANESE PAINTER.
TAP TAP TAP

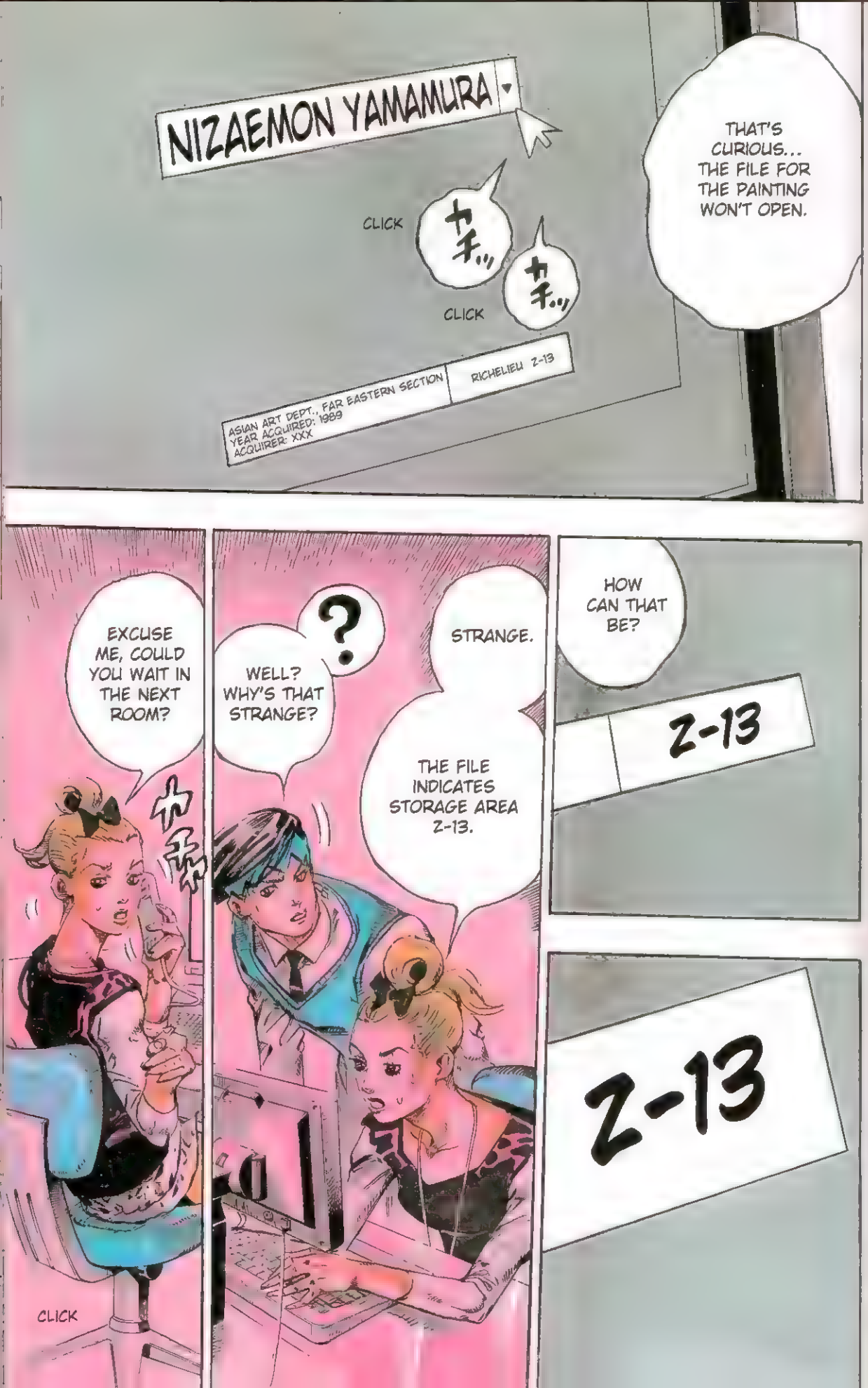

I WAS TOLD THAT PAINTING WAS IN THE LOUVRE'S COLLECTIONS. I SEARCHED FOR IT ONLINE, BUT IT'S NOT AMONG THE EXHIBITED WORKS.
SINCE MY MEMORY ISN'T VERY GOOD, I PREFERRED TO TRAVEL. I WAS AFRAID WHAT INFORMATION I COULD GIVE YOU WOULDN'T BE SUFFICIENT.
SO, I'M SEARCHING FOR A WORK BY A PAINTER WHO'S CALLED, I THINK, NIZAEMON YAMAMURA.

...
GIVE ME THE NAME OF THE PAINTER AGAIN, PLEASE.
カチャ カチャ カチャ
NIZAEMON YAMAMURA, BUT I'M NOT CERTAIN.
TIP TIP TIP TIP

THAT SAID, I'M NOT SURE THE PAINTING TRULY EXISTS OR THAT IT'S HERE... OR RATHER...THAT IT EVER WAS AT THE LOUVRE. I'D JUST LIKE TO BE SURE OF THAT.

YES, IT'S HERE.
REALLY?
AT LEAST I FOUND IT! MAY I SEE IT?
IT'S IN STORAGE.
BUT, IN FACT, IT'S NOT ON DISPLAY.
OUR MUSEUM ACQUIRED IT IN JAPAN MORE THAN TWENTY YEARS AGO.
WE HAVE IT. THE PAINTING'S CALLED "UNDER THE MOON."

SINCE THE PICTURE'S HERE, I'D LIKE TO SEE IT.
SORRY?
BUT I CAME ALL THE WAY FROM JAPAN TO SEE IT!
NOW THAT I KNOW THAT IT'S HERE, LET ME SEE IT! COULDN'T YOU GIVE ME AUTHORIZATION?
THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE. ACCESS TO THE RESERVES IS STRICTLY FORBIDDEN TO THE PUBLIC.
EXCUSE ME, BUT...
NO.
AND THIS IS THE FIRST TIME I'VE EVER HEARD OF THAT ARTIST.
YOU'RE AN EMPLOYEE OF THE MUSEUM. MAYBE YOU'VE ALREADY SEEN IT.
HEY, YOU WOULDN'T HAVE AN IMAGE OF THE PAINTING IN YOUR DATA BANK, WOULD YOU?
HOW MANY?!
IT'S NOT THAT SIMPLE!
YOU'D HAVE TO WAIT SEVERAL WEEKS.


NIZAEMON YAMAMURA
CLICK
カチ...
CLICK
カチ...
ASIAN ART DEPT., FAR EASTERN SECTION
YEAR ACQUIRED: 1989
ACQUIRER: XXX
RICHELIEU Z-13
THAT'S CURIOUS... THE FILE FOR THE PAINTING WON'T OPEN.
EXCUSE ME, COULD YOU WAIT IN THE NEXT ROOM?
カチ カチ
CLICK
WELL? WHY'S THAT STRANGE?
?
STRANGE.
THE FILE INDICATES STORAGE AREA Z-13.
HOW CAN THAT BE?
Z-13
Z-13

...
HMM
YES.
AS WELL AS TWO FIREMEN FROM THE SECURITY SERVICES AND MYSELF.
BUT YOU HAVE ONLY FIVE MINUTES, AND MONSIEUR GAUCHER, THE CURATOR FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF ASIAN ARTS, IS GOING TO ACCOMPANY US.
LEAVE YOUR BAG HERE. DON'T BRING CAMERA, CELL PHONE, PEN, OR LIGHTER, IF YOU HAVE ONE.
EMPTY YOUR POCKETS, PLEASE.
CLICK
YOU'VE BEEN AUTHORIZED TO GO INTO THE STORAGE AREA.
MONSIEUR KISHIBE?

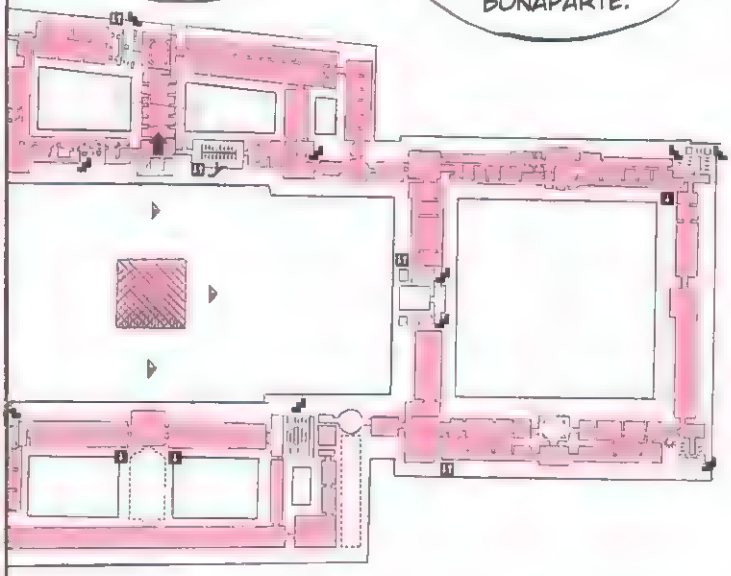
WELL, WE DON'T KNOW WHAT WE'LL FIND!
TAP TAP TAP
...
THANKS FOR THE AUTHORIZATION, BUT ALL THESE PRECAUTIONS MAKE ME FEEL LIKE I'M GOING TO PRISON!
WELL THEN!
I'M MR. GAUCHER, THE CURATOR.
AT THE LOUVRE, WE HAVE NO LESS THAN 350,000 PIECES BY ARTISTS KNOWN OR UNKNOWN...
BUT WE'VE NEVER HEARD OF THAT PAINTER, NIZAEMON YAMAMURA...AT LEAST NOT UNTIL NOW.
HIS PAINTING IS IN STORAGE AREA Z-13. BUT THAT LOCATION'S BEEN ABANDONED.
ABANDONED?

FOR FEAR OF FLOODING BY THE SEINE, ALL THE WORKS THERE WERE TRANSFERRED...

TO ANOTHER SITE, EQUIPPED WITH THE LATEST IN SECURITY SYSTEMS.

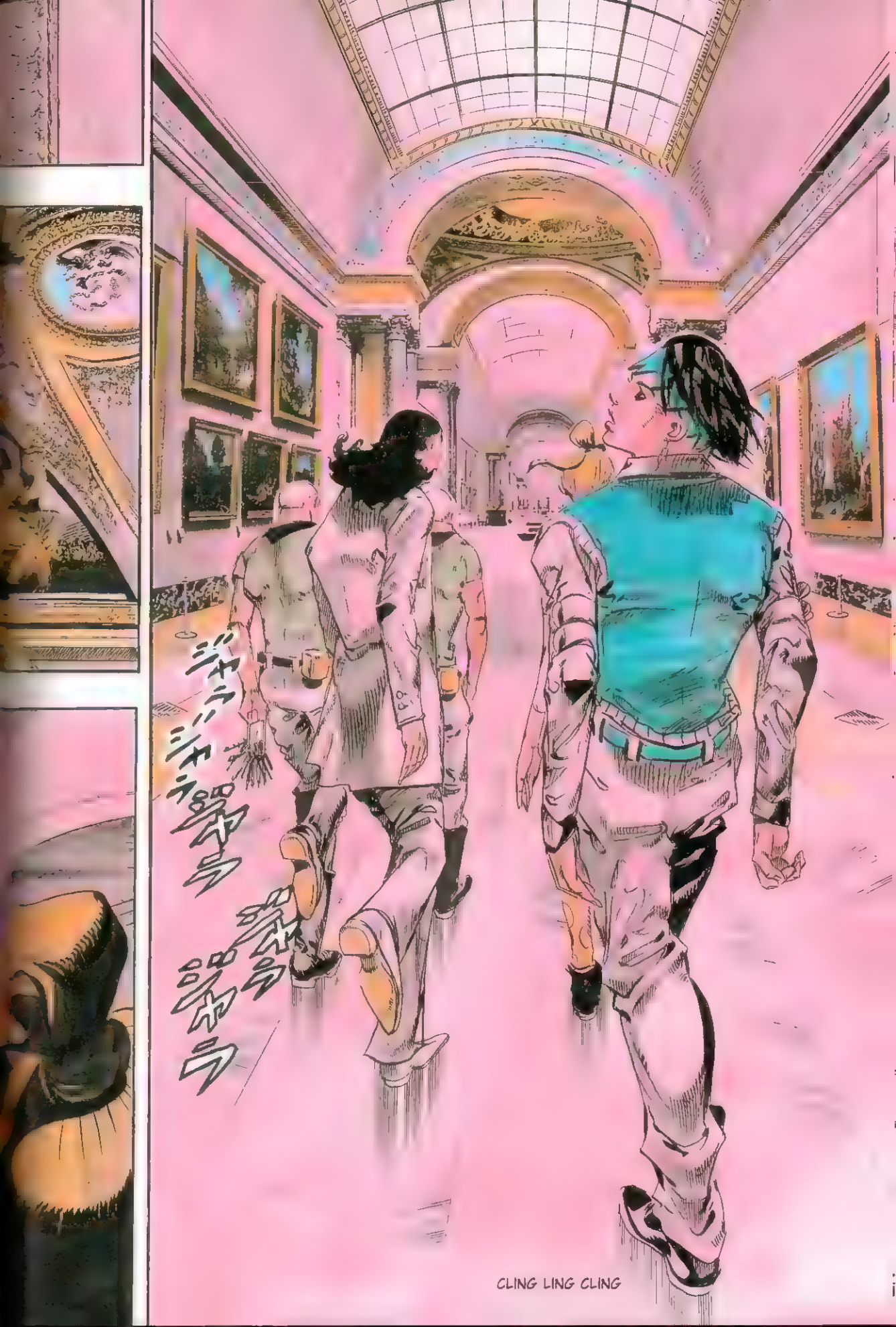
STORAGE AREA Z-13, LOCATED IN THE BASEMENT, DATES FROM THAT ERA. IT WAS STILL BEING USED THIRTY YEARS AGO, BUT...

YES. IN FACT, THE BUILDING FOR THE PRESENT LOUVRE MUSEUM, WHOSE ORIGINS GO BACK TO THE 13TH CENTURY, BECAME A MUSEUM IN 1793, SHORTLY BEFORE THE RISE OF NAPOLEON BONAPARTE.

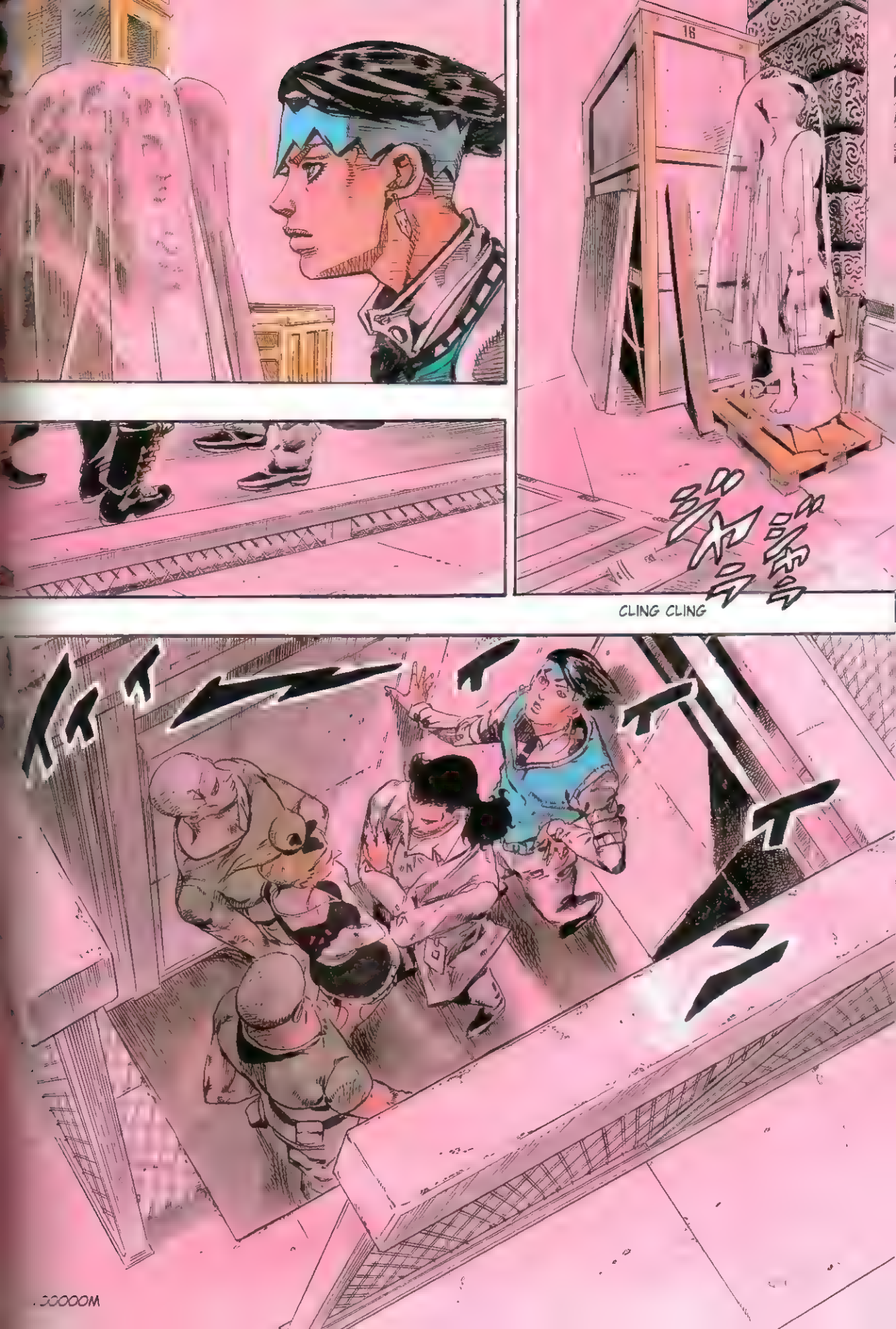


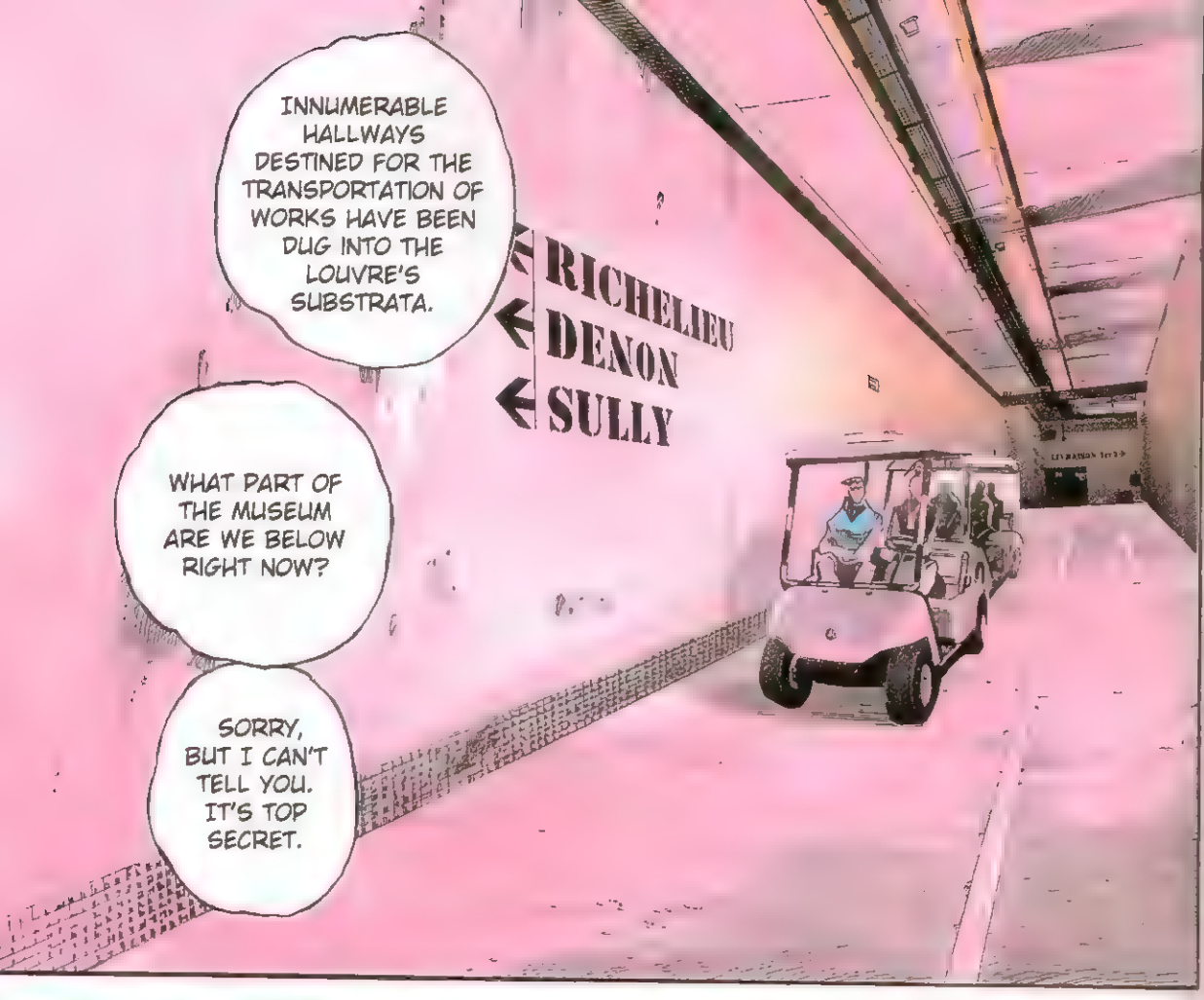
DO YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT THIS MEANS? STORAGE AREA Z-13 HAS BEEN CLOSED OFF FOR THIRTY YEARS, SO NO WORK SHOULD BE LEFT THERE ANYMORE!

IT'S DIFFICULT TO BELIEVE IT'S A COMPUTER ERROR.
HOWEVER, THE FILES INDICATE THAT THAT PAINTING IS STORED DOWN THERE.
SO WE MUST GO CHECK IN PERSON.
?
...
THE STORAGE AREAS ARE LOCATED AT A SIGNIFICANT DEPTH, UNDER THE SULLY WING. YOU'LL SEE THAT THEY FORM A VERITABLE LABYRINTH. AND AS THE LOCATION IS RUN DOWN...
THESE GENTLEMEN, THE FIREMEN, WILL ACCOMPANY US. YOU MUST STICK WITH US, PLEASE.
CLING CLING

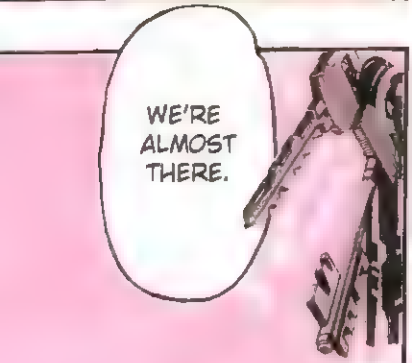

ジャラ ジャラ ジャラ
CLING LING CLING

CLING LING CLING
CLING LING CLING


16
CLING CLING
.OOOOM

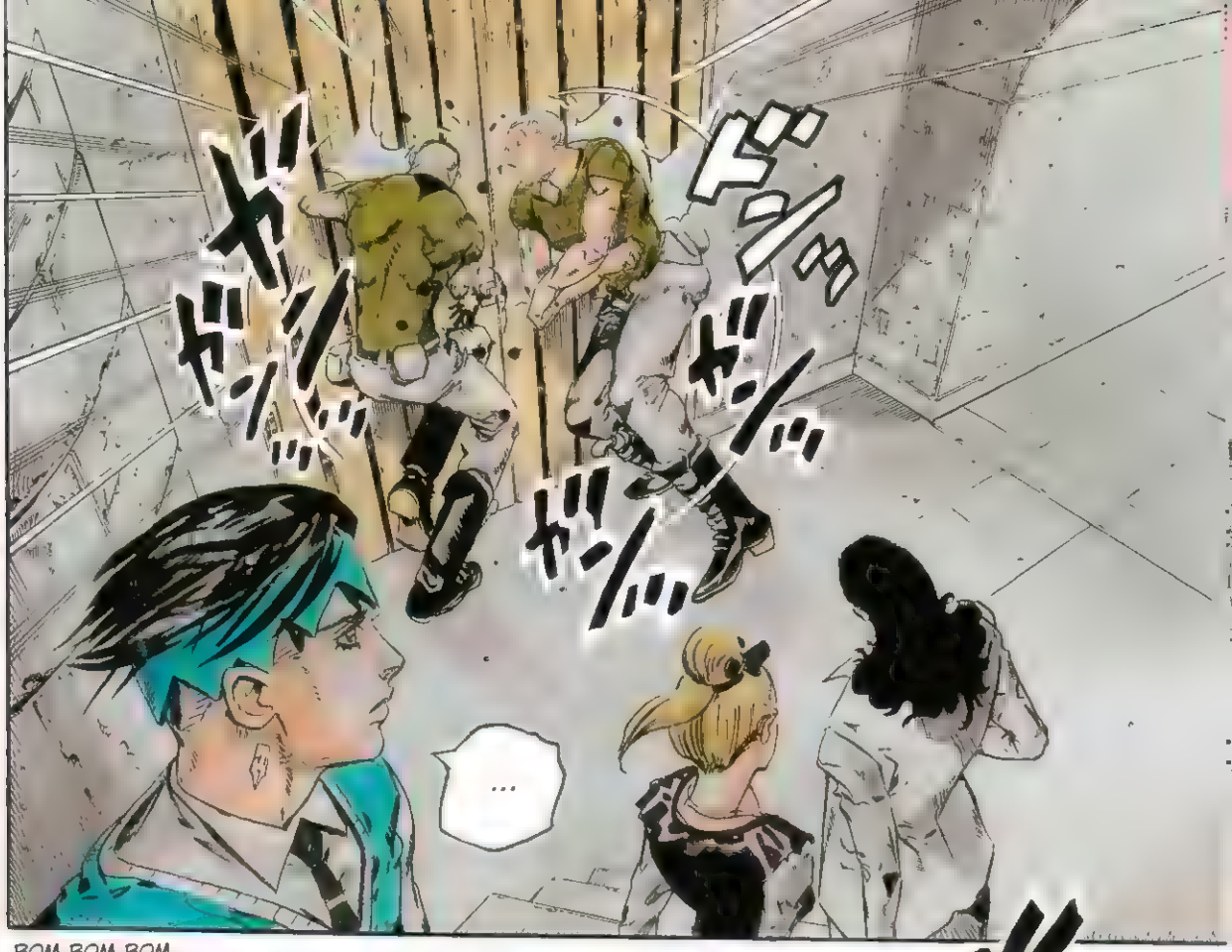

INNUMERABLE HALLWAYS DESTINED FOR THE TRANSPORTATION OF WORKS HAVE BEEN DUG INTO THE LOUVRE'S SUBSTRATA.
RICHELIEU
DENON
SULLY
WHAT PART OF THE MUSEUM ARE WE BELOW RIGHT NOW?
SORRY, BUT I CAN'T TELL YOU. IT'S TOP SECRET.

STOCKAGE
ACCUEIL DES
EXPOSITIONS TEMP


WE'RE ALMOST THERE.

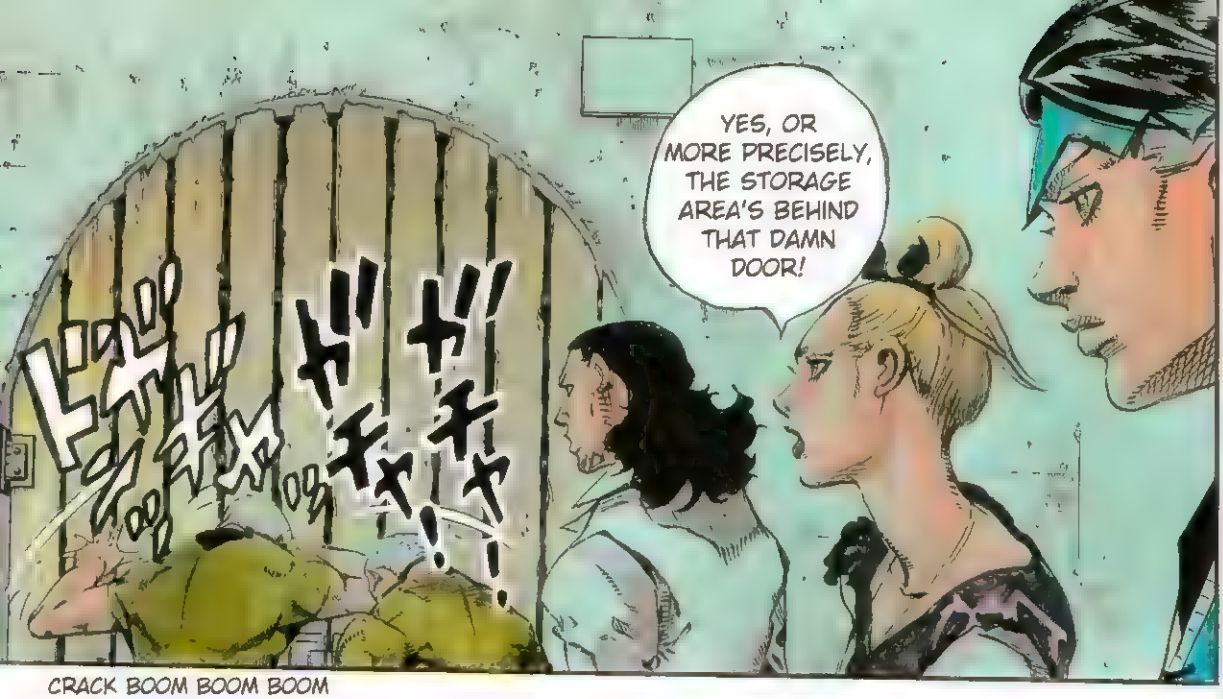
CLILIING
CLICK
CLICK
CLICK
FLASH
FLASH
TAP TAP TAP
FLASH

TATAP TATAP
SORTIE
TATAP TATAP
TATAP TATAP

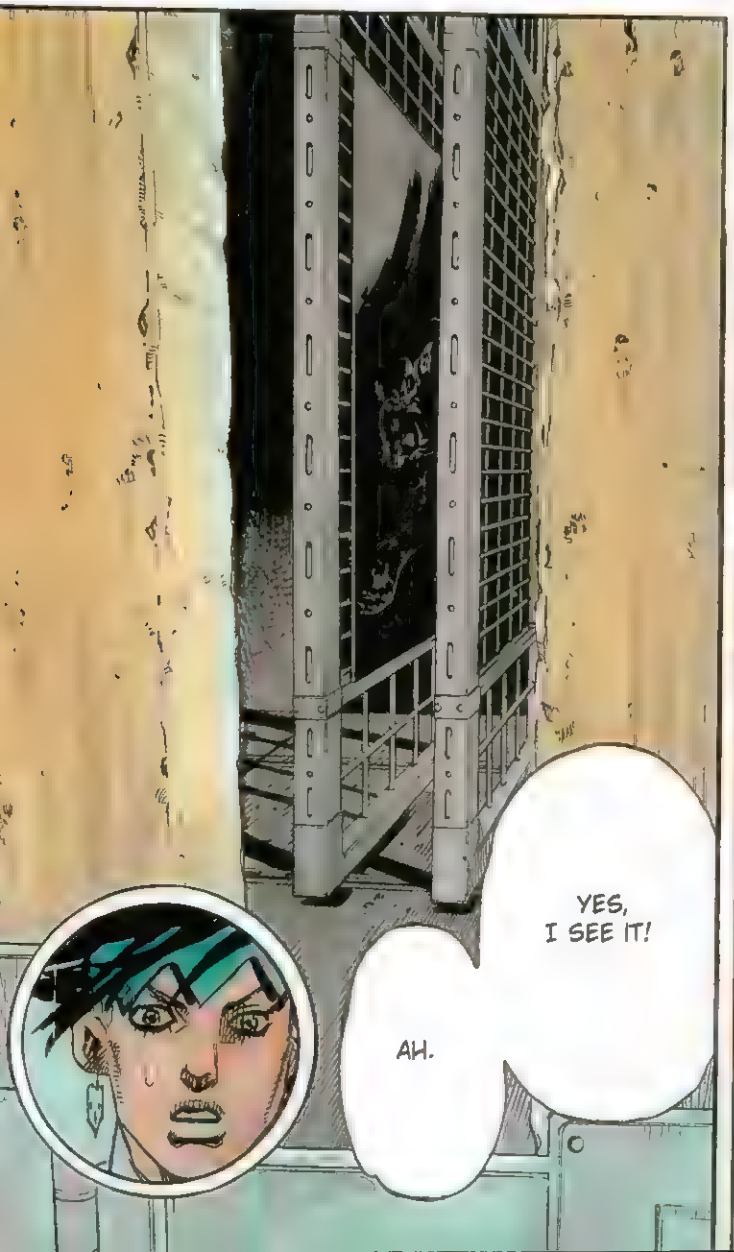

...

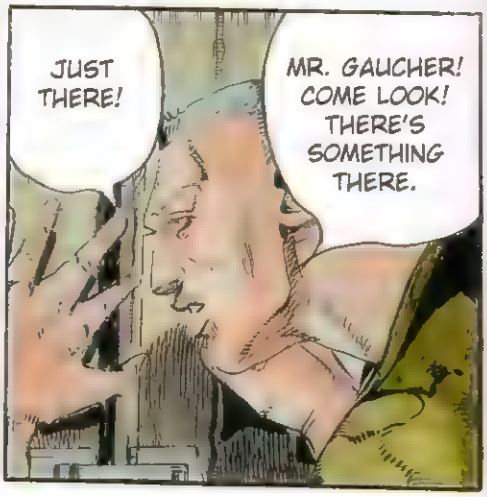
BOM BOM BOM

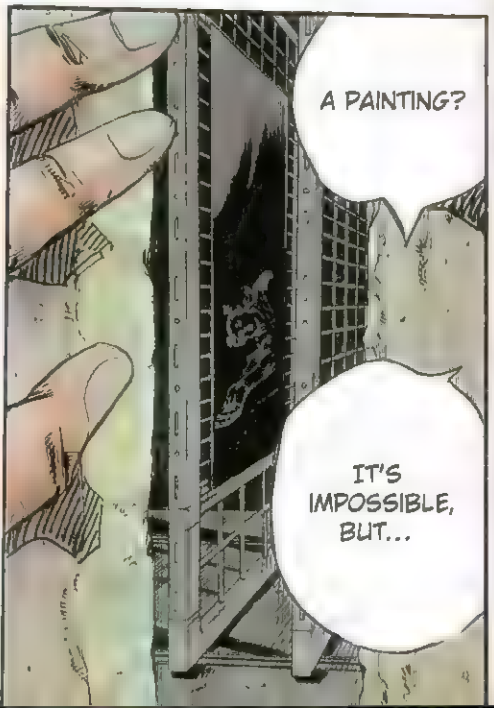
THAT'S STORAGE Z-13?
...
WELL...
THE LOCK'S RUSTED. IT'S STUCK.
THIS DOOR PROBABLY HASN'T BEEN OPENED IN A HELLUVA LONG TIME.
BOM BOM
A PROBLEM?
BAM



CRACK BOOM BOOM BOOM







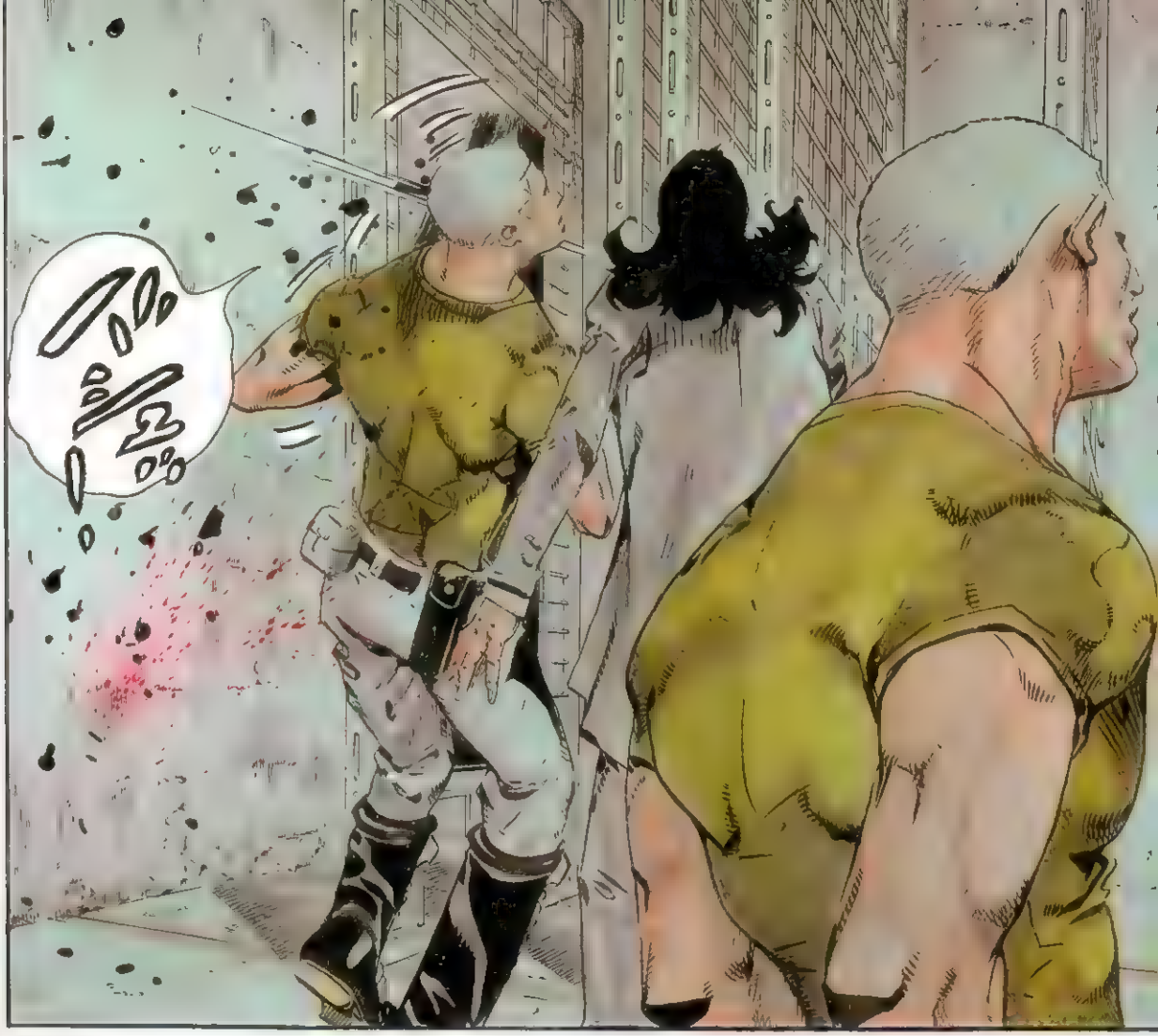
IF IT'S MESSED UP, WE MIGHT AS WELL BREAK IT FOR GOOD! WE'RE SURELY NOT GOING TO COME BACK LATER.
DO WE NEED AUTHORI-ZATION TO BREAK THE LOCK?
IT'S A PAINTING FOR SURE. WHAT THE HELL'S IT DOING HERE?
IT'S TOO DARK. I CAN'T REALLY SEE.

?!
...
...
!!
BLONG

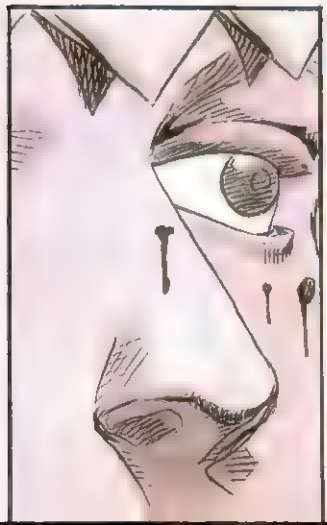
....
BAH, SURELY IT'S A RAT! WE'RE UNDER THE SEINE, NOBODY COMES DOWN HERE.
HURRY UP! LET'S JUST BUST IN THIS DOOR.
?
DID...DID YOU SEE THAT?!
SOMETHING MOVED ON THE OTHER SIDE!

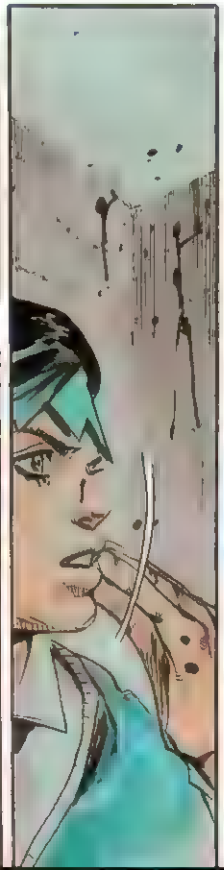
FLAAAAASSH
CRASH CRR CRAC
FLASH

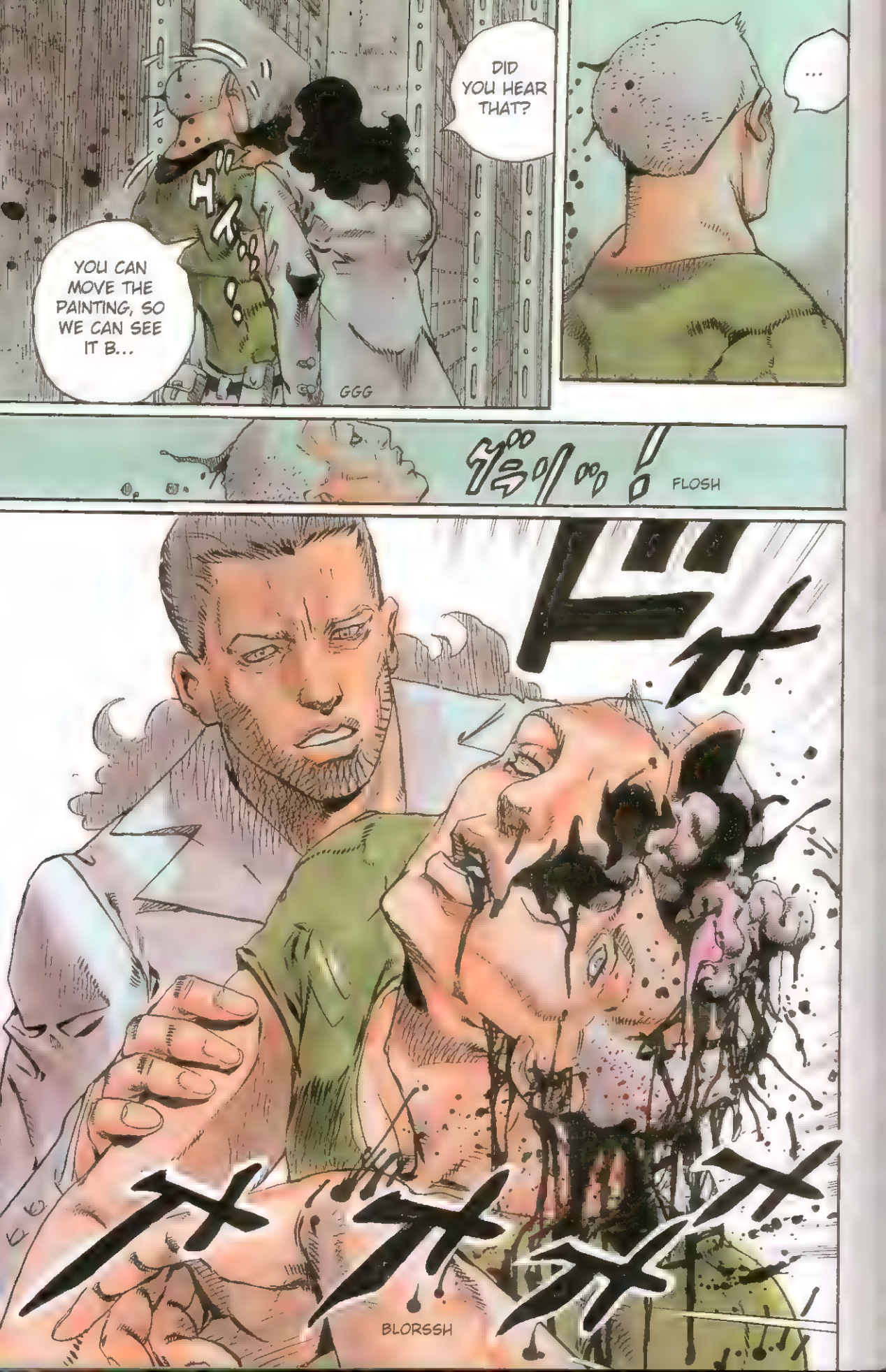
THERE ARE TONS OF RATS! WHO COULD HAVE LEFT IT HERE? WAS IT THE PERSON IN CHARGE OF TRANSFERS WHO SCREWED UP?
THERE'S ONLY ONE PAINTING! NOTHING ELSE!
I'D LIKE TO SEE THE PAINTING IN A MORE UNOBSTRUCTED PLACE AND VERIFY IF IT REALLY IS BY NIZAEMON. IT MAY HAVE TO BE AUTHENTICATED.
AND THE RAT? DO YOU SEE IT?



SPLASH






DID YOU HEAR THAT?
...
YOU CAN MOVE THE PAINTING, SO WE CAN SEE IT B...
GGG
FLOSH
BLORSSH

!!
PROSSSSSH

WHAT'S HAPPEN-ING?!
WHAT'S
!!
AAAAH!
KOT
WHA- THE HELL...

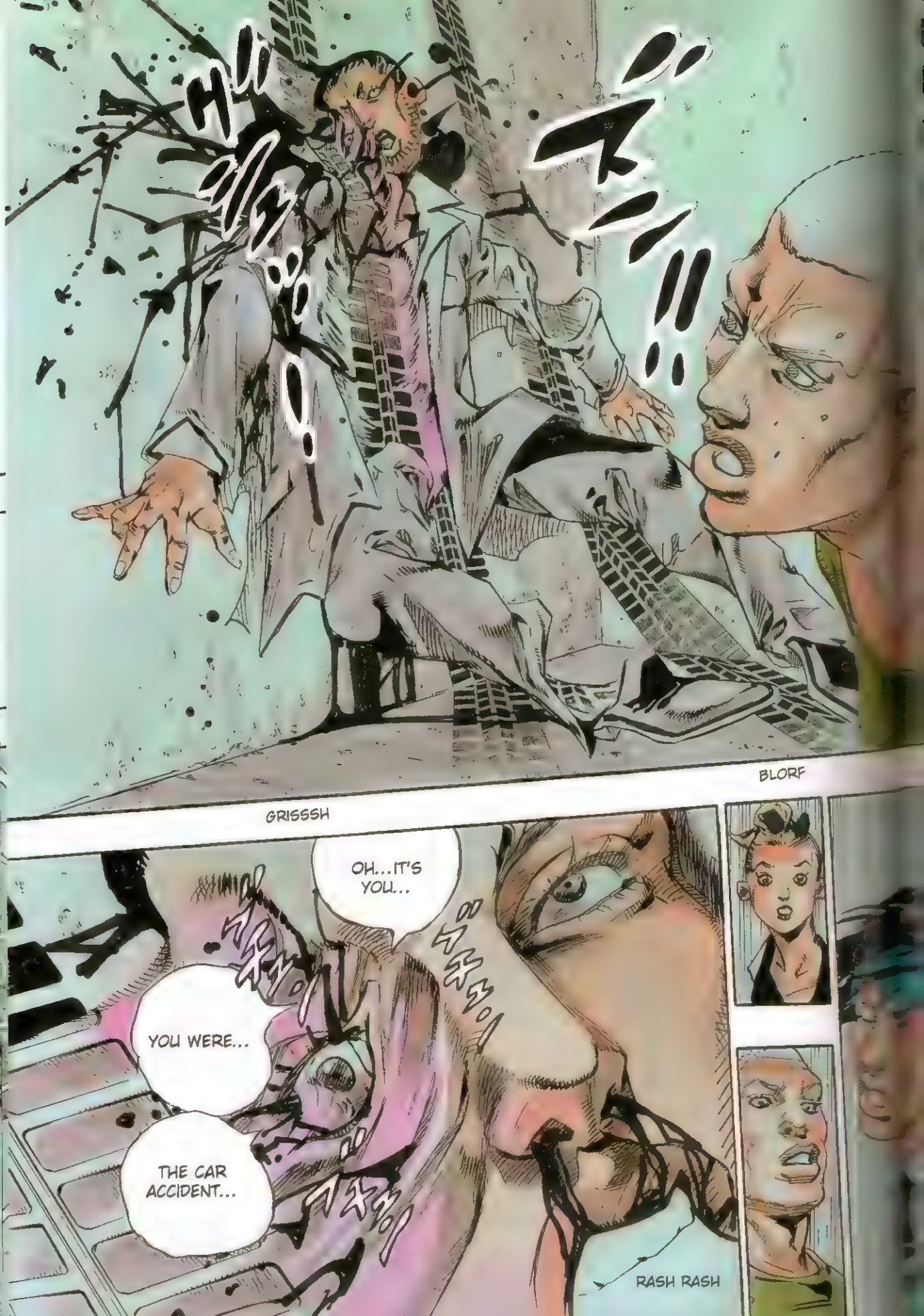
ドガ
PLOP PLOP PLOP
GOOD GOD!! IT'S HORRI-BLE!!
BLOOOOORFF
AAAAH!!

WENT THROUGH?!
HE WAS... HIT ON THE HEAD!
WHAT THE...
BUT...?! WHAT'S WRONG WI- HIM?!
WHAT THE HELL!!
SOME-THING WENT THROUGH HIS SKULL!
PLOP PLOP
PLOP

FFFT FFFT
AH!
...
SOMETHING MOVED BACK THERE!
I SAW A SHADOW.
BEHIND THE PAINTING!
IN THERE!
SOME-THING'S THERE!

...
BROOOH
ROOOH
THE POLICE! CALL THE POLICE!!
THERE...
WHO...WHO ARE...?! WHERE ARE THOSE PEOPLE COMING FROM?!
BUT...

SMAAAASSH

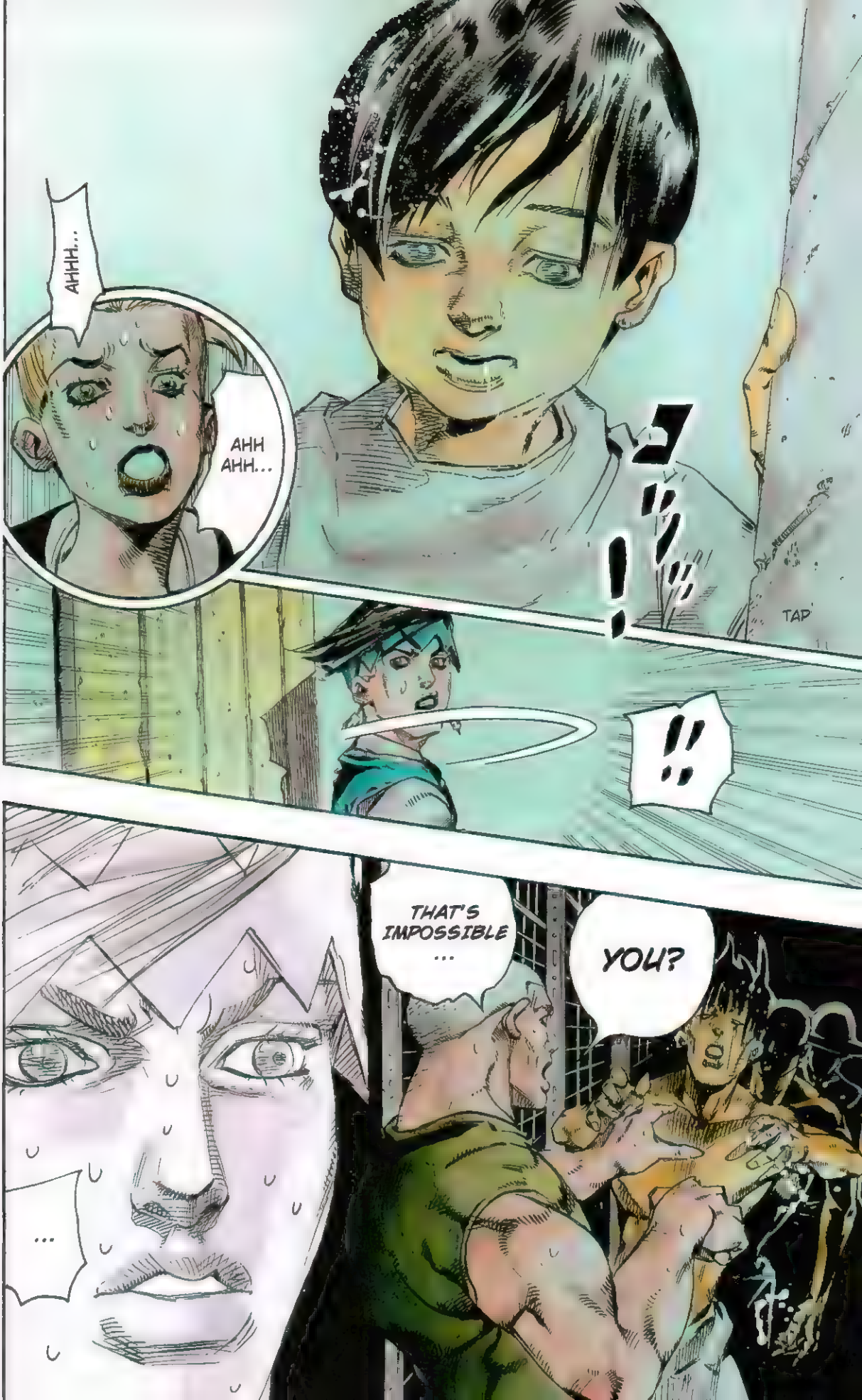

BLORF
GRISSSH
OH...IT'S YOU...
YOU WERE...
THE CAR ACCIDENT...
RASH RASH

ボビーアア
BLORF

ARE YOU?! BUR... BUR-GLARS?!
WHO?! WHO...
NOOOO!
WHAAAAAAAH!
WHAT'S GOING ON?! WHAT HAVE WE GOTTEN INTO?!
NO, IMPOSSIBLE! THIS FEELING, ALL THIS BLOOD... IT'S TOO TWISTED!!
THESE PEOPLE, ARE THEY ART THIEVES?
WHO ARE THEY? AND HOW MANY OF THEM ARE THERE?
FOUR?
SOME THIEVES? THOSE THINGS!? NO! IF THAT'S ALL IT WAS, WE WOULDN'T BE SCARED LIKE THIS!!
WHERE ARE THEY COMING FROM? WHERE WERE THEY BEFORE NOW?
STAP
FFFT
ROOOH

TATAP
TATAP TATAP TATAP
I'M SAFE!
UP THERE, SOMEBODY!
WHAAAAH!!
STAP TAP TAP
TAP TAP TAP
HELP! HELP ME!
PLEASE!

...
...
TAP TAP
TAP TAP
...
...
TAP TAP TAP TAP


AHHH...
AHH AHH...
!?!!!
TAP
!!
THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE ...
YOU?
...

AAH!
NO, GET BACK!
NO! DON'T COME ANY CLOSER!!
?
ON THE BATTLE-FIELD... DURING THE WAR.
NO...
I...I SAW YOU...
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE AT THE LOUVRE?
SST
ROOOH

BAANG

...
VROSSSH

WHAT DID THEY DO TO THAT FIREMAN?
THEY SHOT HIM DOWN? BUT HOW?!
GHOSTS?
WHO ARE THEY?!
ALL THESE PEO-PLE...
ドドドド
IS THAT YOU, PIERRE ?
PIERRE?
ROOOH
DZOM DZOM DZOM

DZOM DZOM DZOM
BUT...
GRANDMA?
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
IS THAT REALLY YOU, GRANDMA? YOU DIED LAST YEAR...
PIERRE...
NO! IT'S NOT POSSIBLE!!
WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU?! WHY HAVE YOU COME BACK?
...

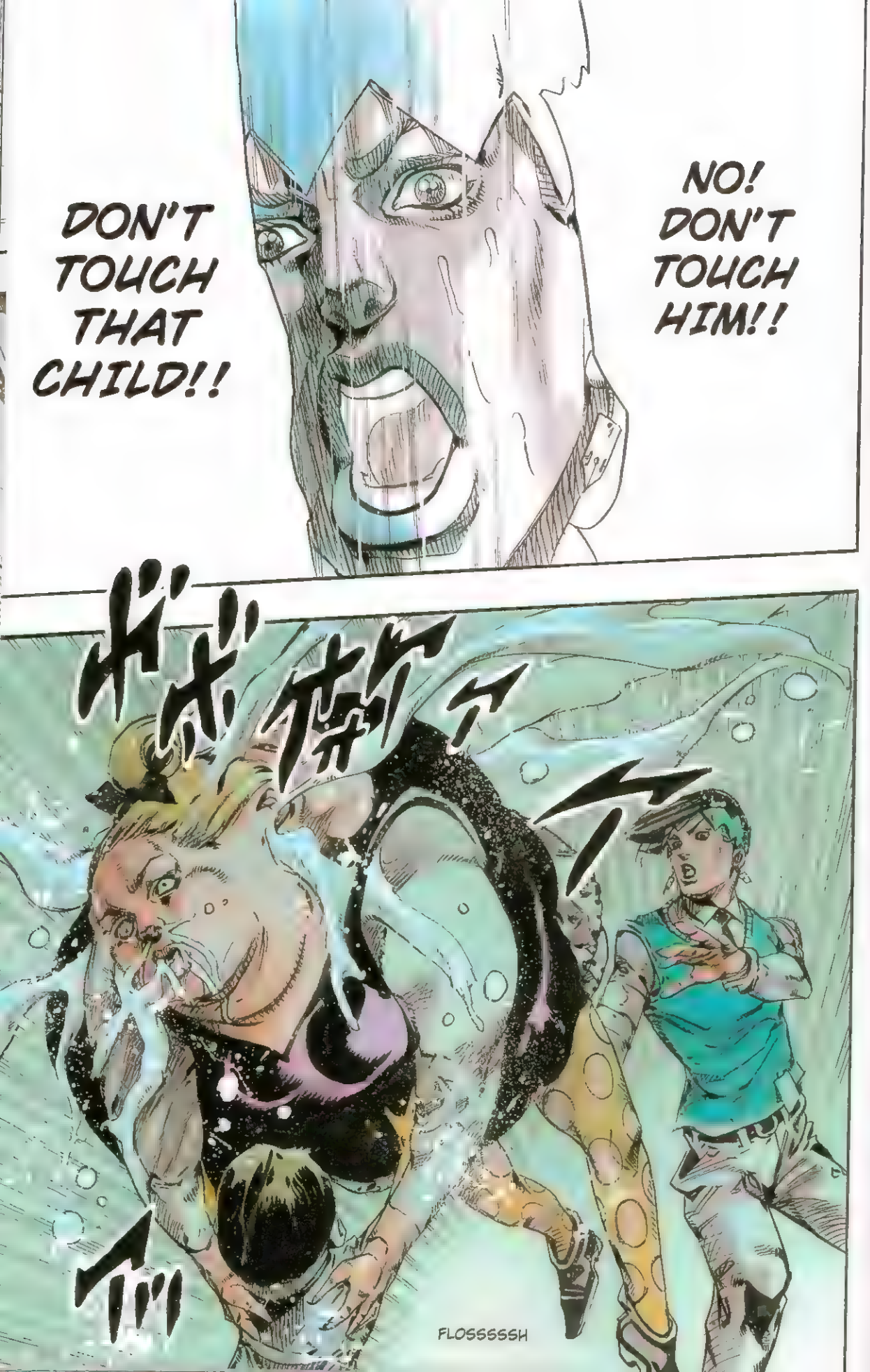
ドドド

FOSSH FOSSH FOSSH
THE PAGES OF THEIR BOOK SPEAK ONLY OF DEATH!
ALL DEAD.
death
death
death
death
death
death
death
death
death
THESE BEINGS ARE THE LIVING DEAD! THEY'RE LIFELESS, LIFELESS!!
FSSS SSS
CRRAC!

AH!
GHOSTS...
NO, THAT'S NOT IT.
THEY'RE NOT SIMPLY PHANTOMS! WHY MY GRANDPAR-ENTS?! THERE MUST BE A REASON!!
ROOOH

IT'S
THE
PAINT

MY LITTLE PIERRE, MY DARLING...
IT'S MY FAULT YOU DROWNED... FORGIVE ME... YOUR MAMA DIDN'T MEAN TO...
ROOOH
I HADN'T LEFT YOU ALONE!
IF ONLY...
IF ONLY I HADN'T GONE BACK TO THE CAR TO GET MY STUFF, LEAVING YOU BESIDE THE LAKE!
MY BABY!!

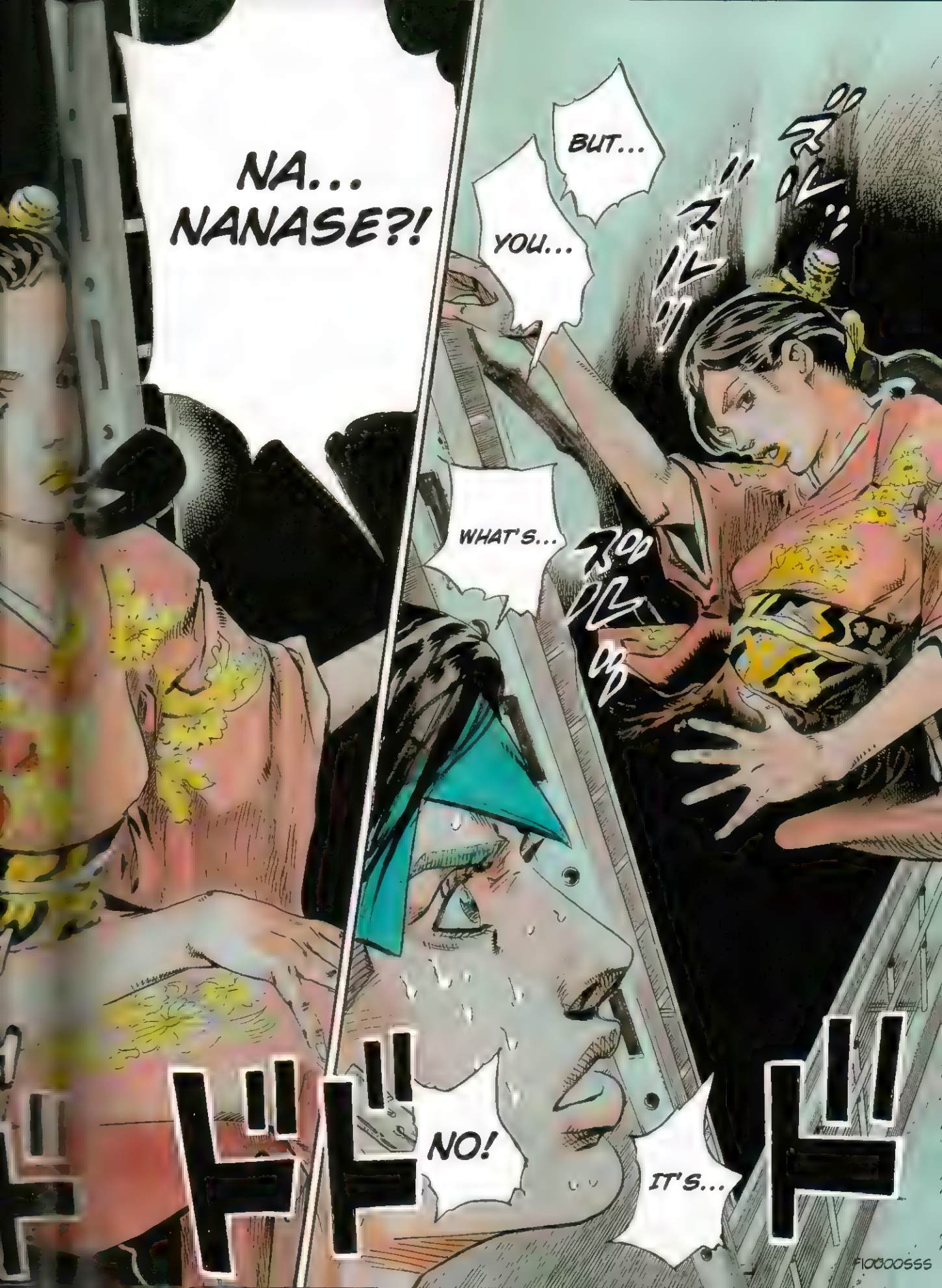

DON'T TOUCH THAT CHILD!!
NO! DON'T TOUCH HIM!!
ボボボボ
FLOSSSSSH

LET GO OF HIM! RIGHT NOW!
BROSSSH

HAVE SEEN YOU AGAIN, MY ANGEL.
ゴシュ!
I'M SO HAPPY...
TO...
FLOSSH
ボボボボ!!

ドドド
ROOOH
!
ドドド

ドドドドド
ズルルルル
S100 S1000
S100 S100
ROOOH


NA... NANASE?!
BUT...
YOU...
WHAT'S...
ドドドド
NO!
IT'S...
ドドドド

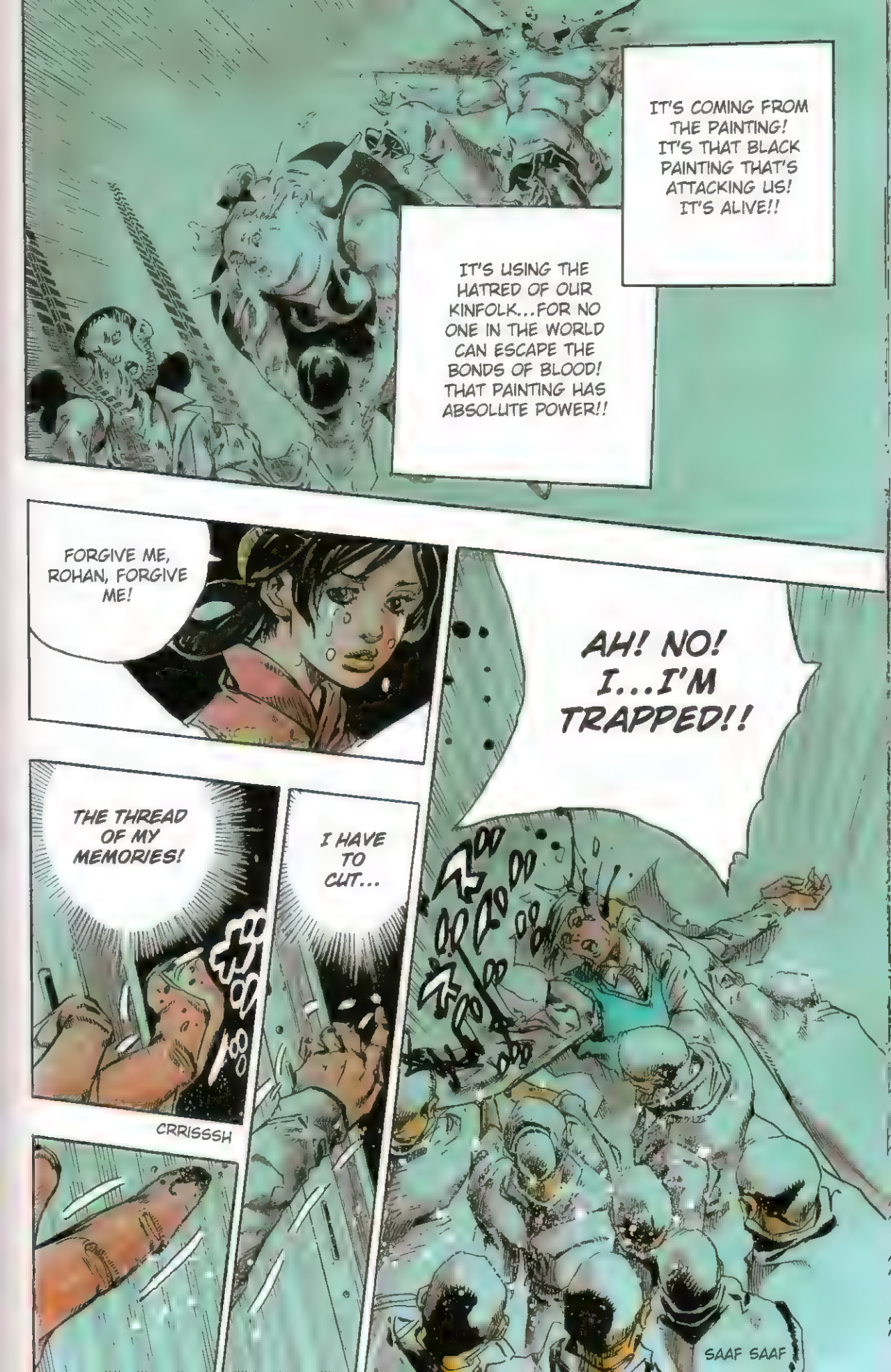
I'M...I'M DREAMING?!
OH HELL!!
ドドド
GROOOOO
ドド
FSSS

G...GET AWAY!
NO! IT'S NOT REAL!
STOP!!
NO!!
IT'S JUST...MY IMAGINATION!
ドドド

WHAAAAAAH!!
ズ
ズ
ズ
SRASSH RASSH

AAAAAAAAH!!
WHAAAAH!!
CHOP
PLEASE DON'T BE ANGRY AT ME.
I HAD NO OTHER CHOICE. HIS HATRED HAD TO EMERGE ONE DAY.
FORGIVE ME, ROHAN.
FORGIVE ME.

ALL THOSE PEOPLE, ALL THOSE CLOSE ONES...
THOSE CREATURES COMING OUT OF THE STAIRS.
THEY'RE ALL OUR KIN! OUR ANCESTORS!!
THE INTERPRETER'S CHILD, MY GRANDPARENTS, ALL OF THEM... THEY LIVED LONG BEFORE US!
WE'RE GOING TO PERISH LIKE OUR LOVED ONES PERISHED! ALL THAT HATRED...
SRISSH


IT'S COMING FROM THE PAINTING! IT'S THAT BLACK PAINTING THAT'S ATTACKING US! IT'S ALIVE!!
IT'S USING THE HATRED OF OUR KINFOLK...FOR NO ONE IN THE WORLD CAN ESCAPE THE BONDS OF BLOOD! THAT PAINTING HAS ABSOLUTE POWER!!
FORGIVE ME, ROHAN, FORGIVE ME!
AH! NO! I...I'M TRAPPED!!
THE THREAD OF MY MEMORIES!
I HAVE TO CUT...
CRRISSSH
SAAF SAAF

HEAVEN'S DOOR! I'M GOING...TO REWRITE IT!
Erase all my memory
ERASE EVERYTHING...
Erase all my memory
FLAP
SAP
CRISSH SHAC GLASSH

ドドドド
BLOM
FLAAASSH

SSSHZZWIIP

SHTOM
Erase all my memory
Erase all my memory
AHH AAA AAA
AHH AAA AAA
AHHH

AHH
AHH
AHH
AHH
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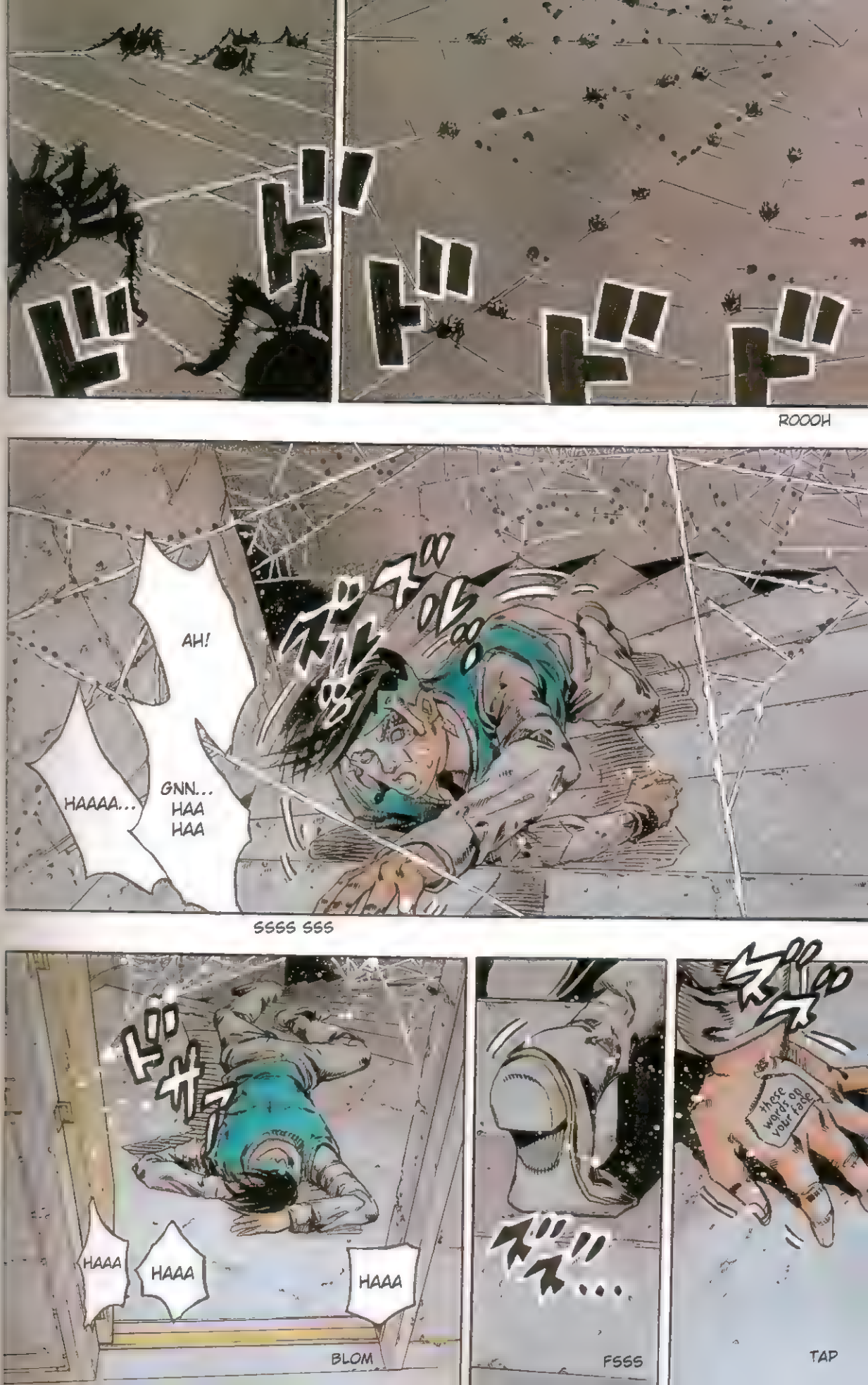
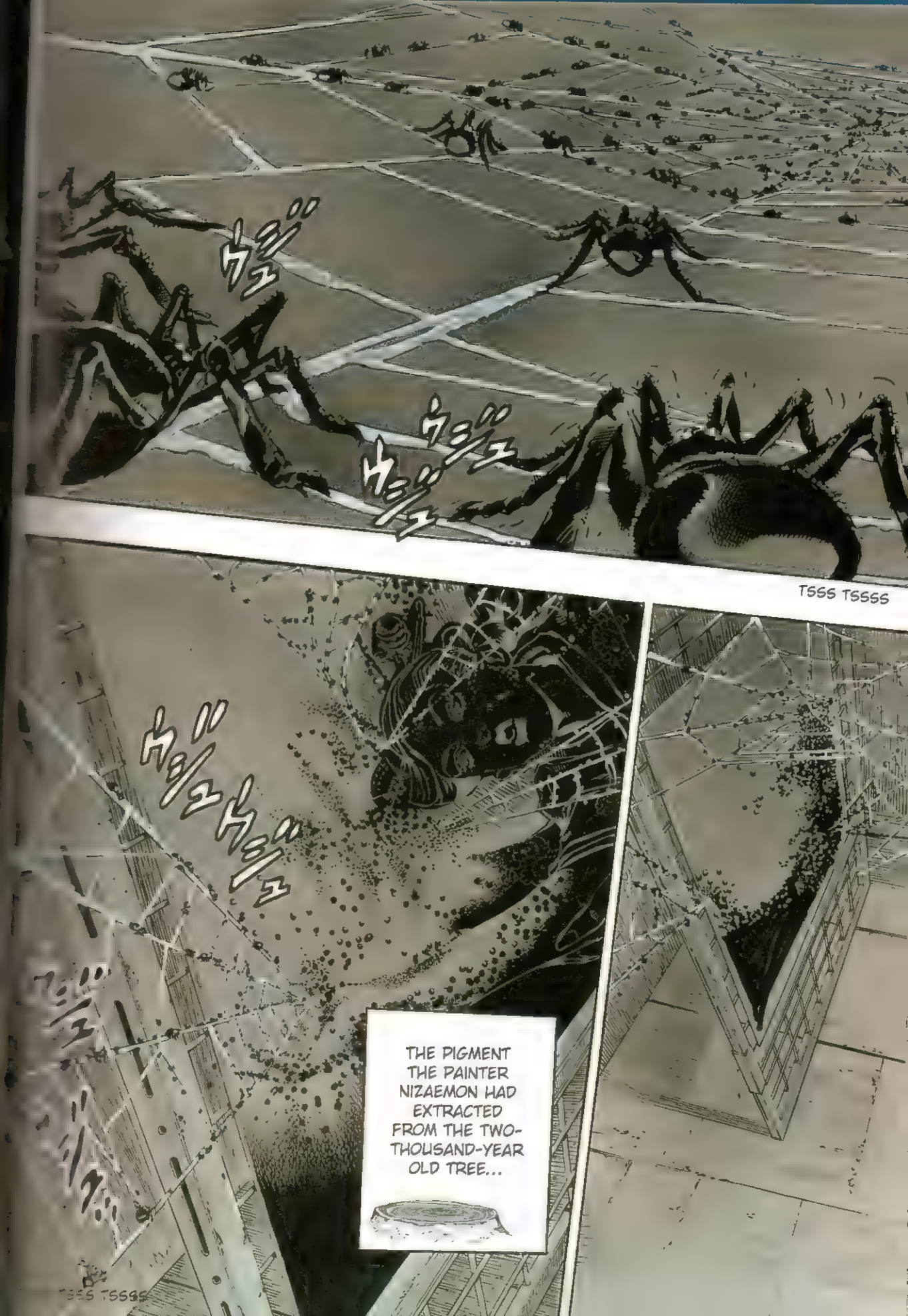
ドドド


ROOOH
AH!
HAAAA...
GNN... HAA HAA
SSSS SSS
HAAA
HAAA
HAAA
BLOM
FSSS
these words on your face
TAP

ERASE ALL
Erase all my memory
RUB
all my memory
?!
HAA HAAA
Rub these words on your face
FROSSSH
RUB RUB

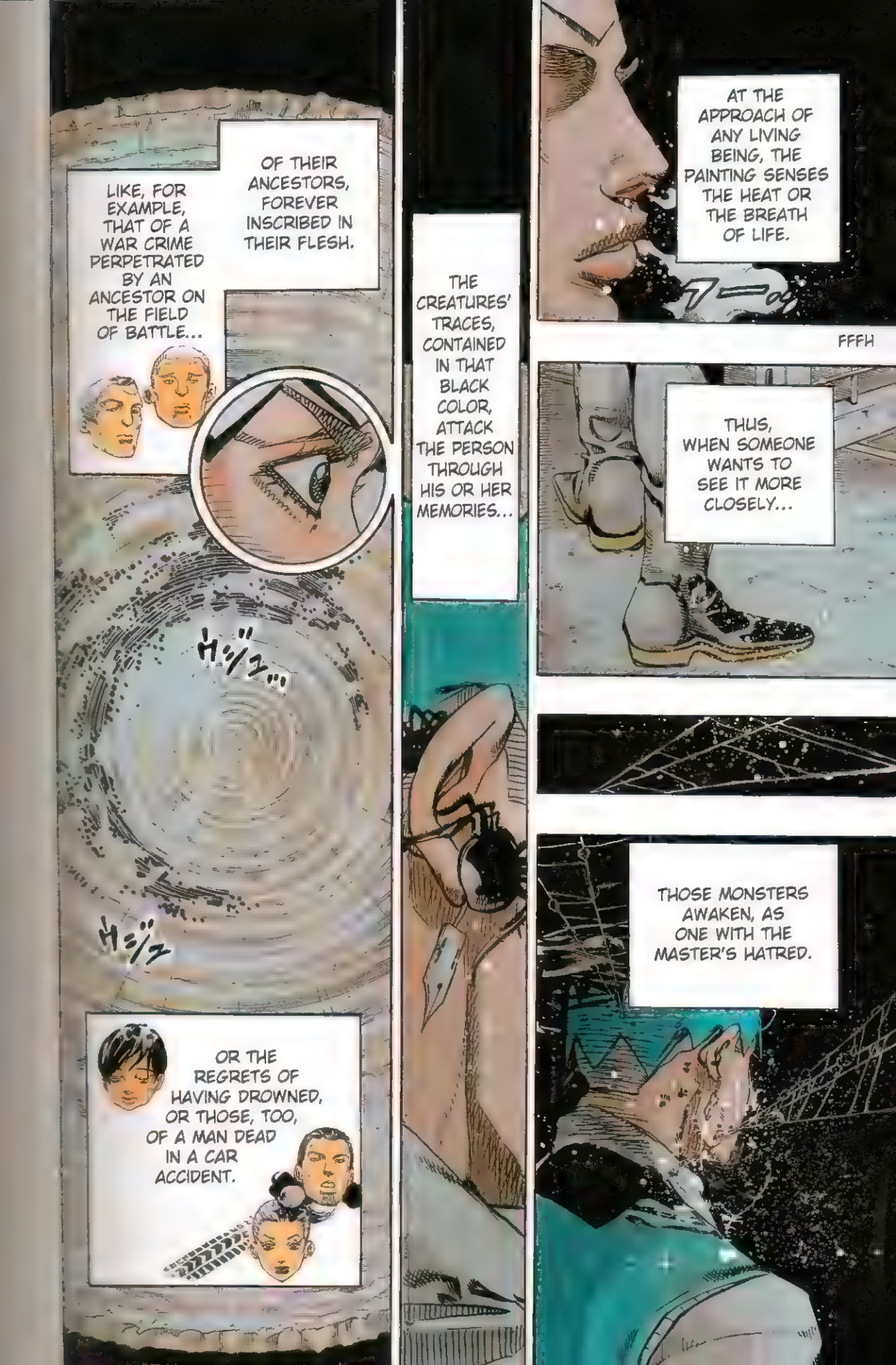

TSSS TSSSS
THE PIGMENT THE PAINTER NIZAEMON HAD EXTRACTED FROM THE TWO-THOUSAND-YEAR OLD TREE...
TSSS TSSSS

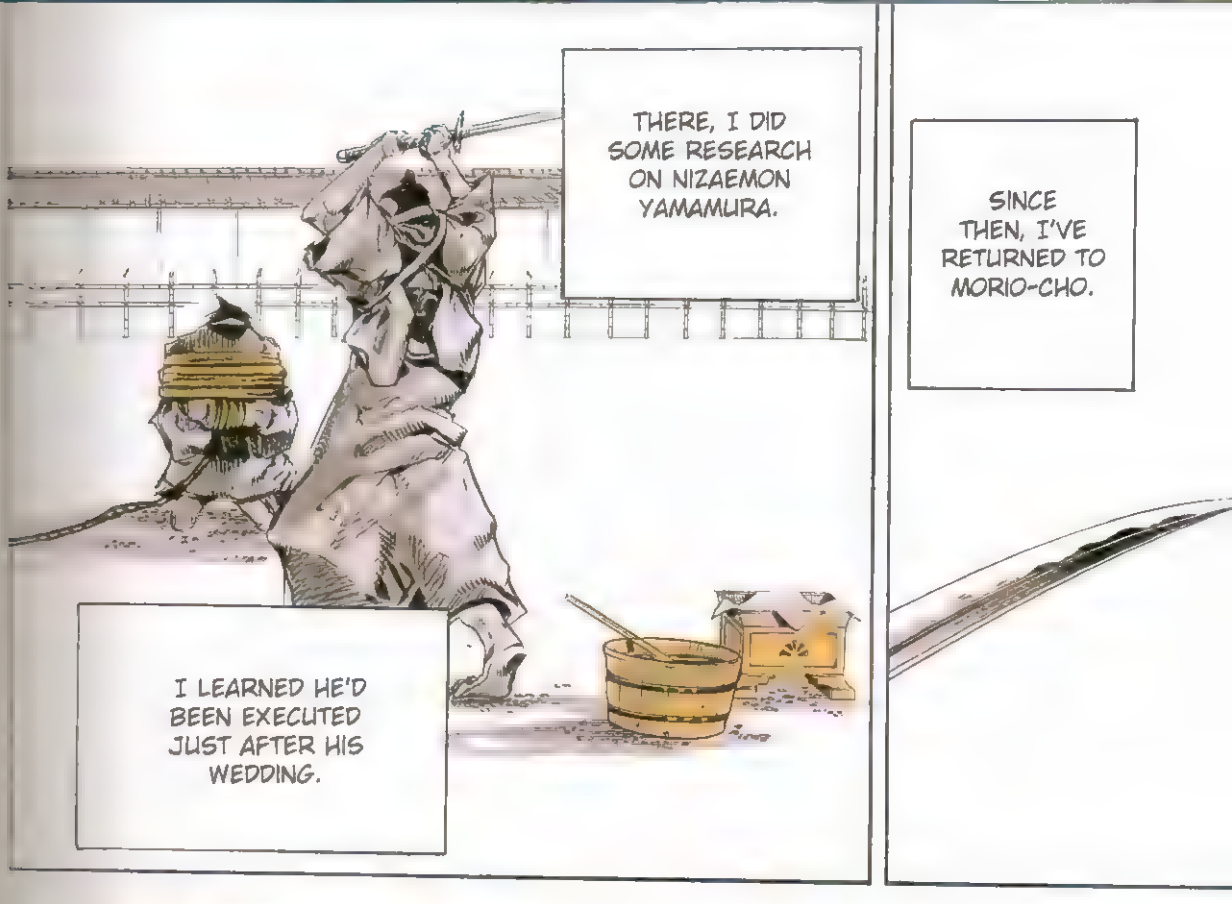
CAME FROM A SUBSTANCE DRAWN FROM INSECTS LIVING IN THE VERY HEART OF THE MILLENNIAL TRUNK.

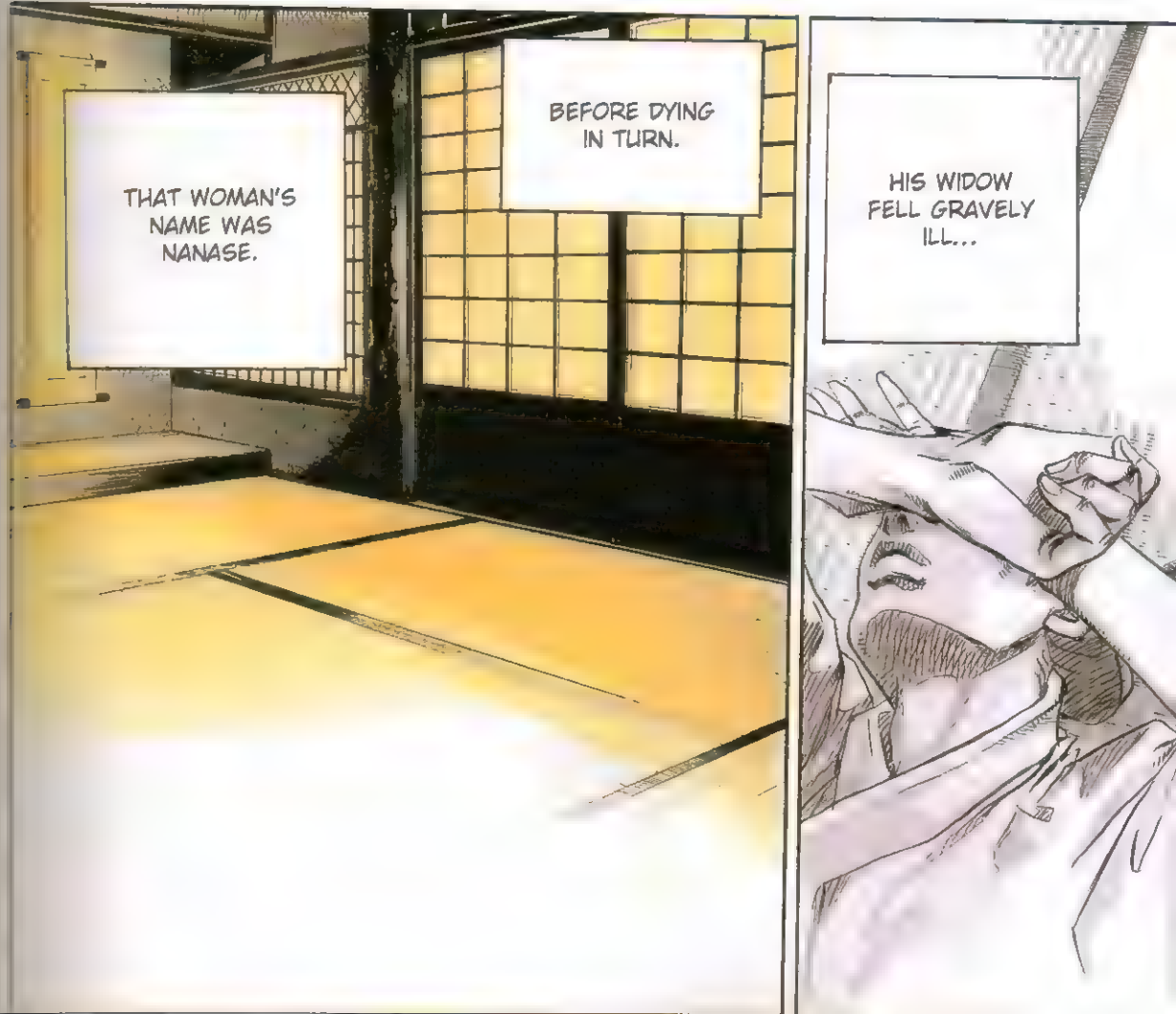
INFINITELY BLACK CREATURES, RESEMBLING SPIDERS, LURKING IN THE DARKNESS SINCE THE DAWN OF TIME.

NIZAEMON USED THAT PIGMENT FOR HIS CANVASES, BEFORE BEING EXECUTED.

HIS LOATHING FOR HAVING KNOWN SUCH A FATE WAS FOREVER LOCKED INTO THAT PAINTING, A WORK OF INFINITE CREATIVITY.

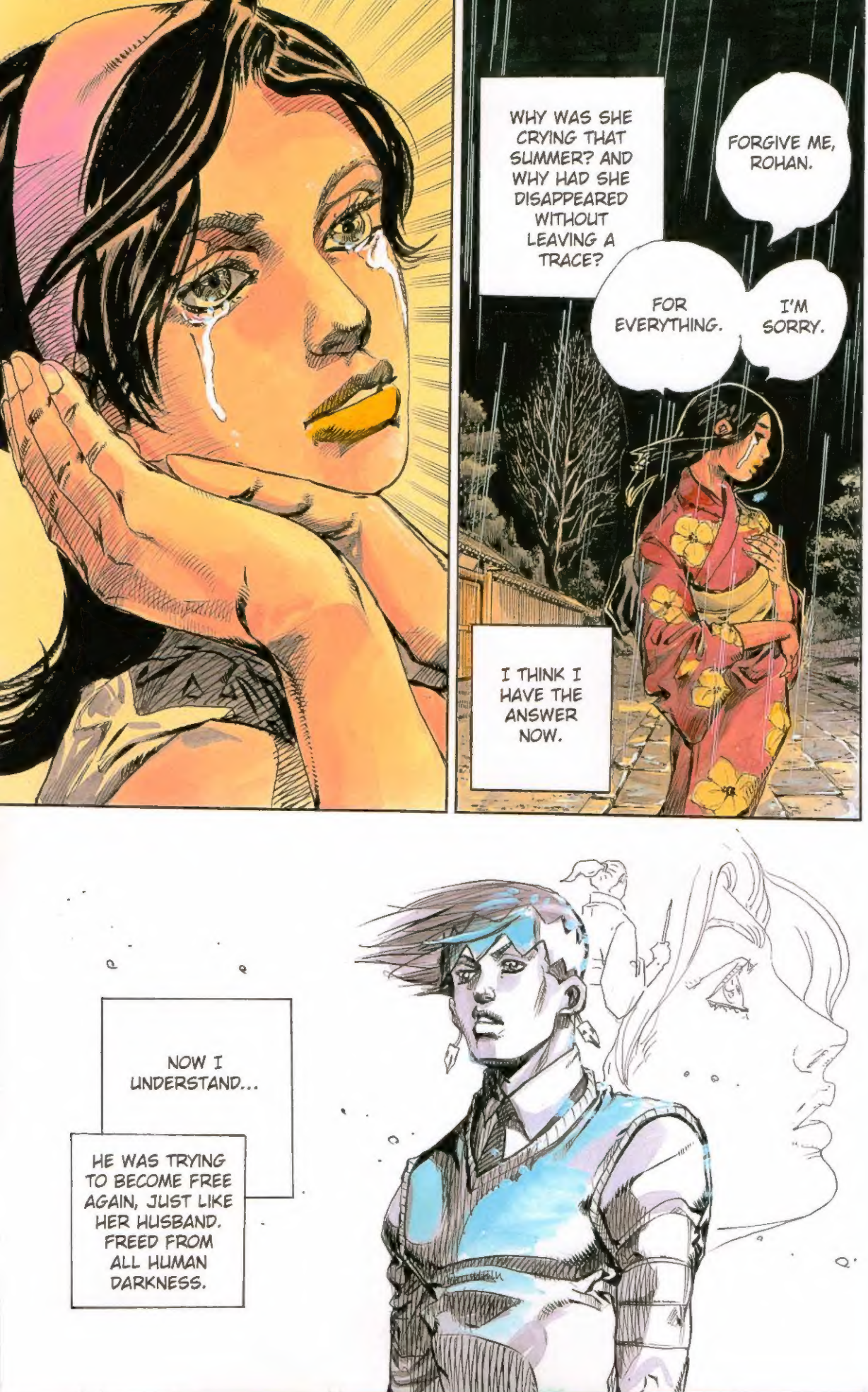

AT THE APPROACH OF ANY LIVING BEING, THE PAINTING SENSES THE HEAT OR THE BREATH OF LIFE.
FFFH
THUS, WHEN SOMEONE WANTS TO SEE IT MORE CLOSELY...
THOSE MONSTERS AWAKEN, AS ONE WITH THE MASTER'S HATRED.
THE CREATURES' TRACES, CONTAINED IN THAT BLACK COLOR, ATTACK THE PERSON THROUGH HIS OR HER MEMORIES...
OF THEIR ANCESTORS, FOREVER INSCRIBED IN THEIR FLESH.
LIKE, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT OF A WAR CRIME PERPETRATED BY AN ANCESTOR ON THE FIELD OF BATTLE...
H=/Z...
H=/Z
OR THE REGRETS OF HAVING DROWNED, OR THOSE, TOO, OF A MAN DEAD IN A CAR ACCIDENT.

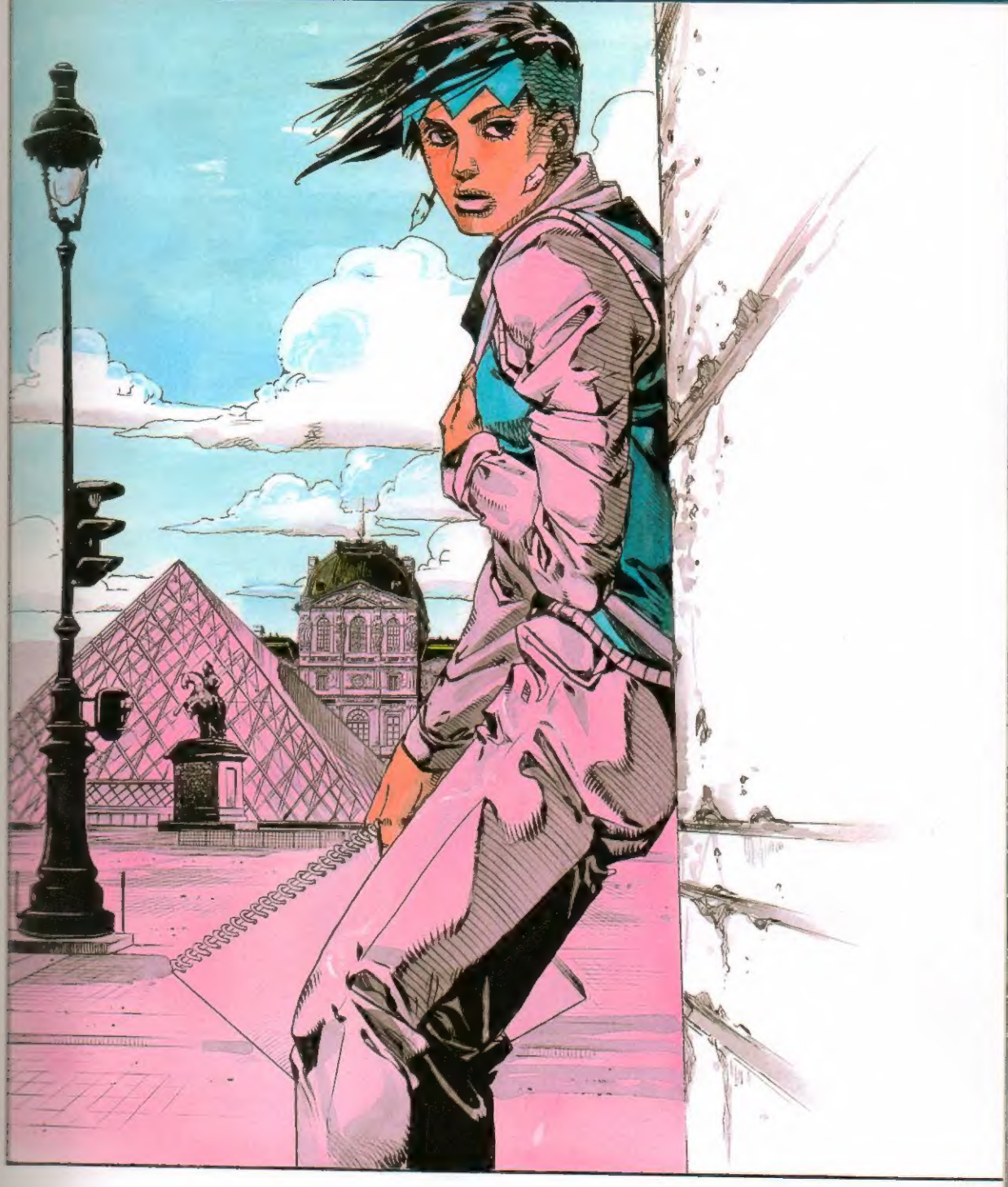

THERE, I DID SOME RESEARCH ON NIZAEMON YAMAMURA.
I LEARNED HE'D BEEN EXECUTED JUST AFTER HIS WEDDING.
SINCE THEN, I'VE RETURNED TO MORIO-CHO.


THAT WOMAN'S NAME WAS NANASE.
BEFORE DYING IN TURN.
HIS WIDOW FELL GRAVELY ILL...

NANASE...
KISHIBE.
SINCE HER DEATH, SHE'D TRIED TO LOCK AWAY THE HATRED AT THE HEART OF HER PORTRAIT. SHE INCARNATED THE CURSE OF THE CANVAS, KILLING PEOPLE FOR 300 YEARS.
NIZAEMON HAD PAINTED A PORTRAIT OF THE WOMAN WHO WAS HIS WIFE AND ALSO MY ANCESTRESS.
HER INTENTION WAS TO FOREVER SEAL AWAY THE HEART OF HER HUSBAND, DOING SO THROUGH ME.
YOU DREW ME IN YOUR MANGA?!
WHY DID YOU DO THAT?! IT MAKES NO SENSE!

I'D HAVE ENDED UP CUT INTO PIECES IN THE DEPTHS OF THE LOUVRE, SUCCUMBING TO THE MEMORY OF DESIRE ONCE FELT FOR HER.
NIZAEMON'S RANCOR WOULD HAVE CERTAINLY KILLED ME!
WHY DID SHE RIP UP MY DRAWINGS THAT DAY?
WHO KNOWS WHAT WOULD HAVE HAPPENED IF, TEN YEARS EARLIER, SHE HADN'T DESTROYED MY DRAWINGS.
A DESIRE IMPOSSIBLE TO FORGET, LIKE EVERY FIRST LOVE.


WHY WAS SHE CRYING THAT SUMMER? AND WHY HAD SHE DISAPPEARED WITHOUT LEAVING A TRACE?
FORGIVE ME, ROHAN.
FOR EVERYTHING.
I'M SORRY.
I THINK I HAVE THE ANSWER NOW.
NOW I UNDERSTAND...
HE WAS TRYING TO BECOME FREE AGAIN, JUST LIKE HER HUSBAND. FREED FROM ALL HUMAN DARKNESS.



EPILOGUE: THE CURATOR FROM THE LOUVRE WHO'D ACQUIRED THE INFAMOUS "BLACK PAINTING" IN JAPAN IN 1989 STILL APPEARS ON THE LIST OF MISSING PERSONS. THAT'S ALSO THE CASE FOR MY FOUR COMPANIONS IN MISFORTUNE. I FEAR NOBODY WILL EVER SEE THEM AGAIN.

AS FOR THE PAINTING...

I HEARD THAT, AFTER A THOROUGH, SCIENTIFIC EXAMINATION, IT WAS BURNED. BUT IS THAT THE TRUTH? MY ATTEMPTS TO CONFIRM THAT VERSION...

HAVE COME TO NAUGHT, NO DOUBT BECAUSE IT CONCERNS A POSSESSION OF THE LOUVRE. THUS, ITS MYSTERY WILL FOREVER REMAIN OUT OF REACH.